



How to Host a Synodal Spiritual Conversation



Thank you for hosting a Synodal Spiritual Conversation taking place at the Church of St. Francis Xavier! This guide is designed to assist you as you plan and host a sacred experience for your fellow Catholics to share and listen to one another about our journeys with the Church. Questions? Email the Xavier Pastoral Council at pastoralcouncil@sfxavier.org.

MATERIALS

In addition to this guide, you will need the following (all available at SFX's [Synod website](#) by following the links below):

- [Facilitator's Guide](#)
- [Notetaker's Guide](#)
- [Participant's Preparation Guide](#)

PEOPLE

To hold a Spiritual Conversation, you'll need to recruit people to fill the following roles:

- A **convener** who hosts the entire gathering, leads those gathered in an opening and closing prayer, and introduces speakers and components of the gathering.
- An **Examen leader** who prayerfully leads those gathered in a guided Examen to help prepare their hearts for conversation.
- One trained **facilitator** and one **notetaker** for each small conversation group. Plan on one facilitator and one notetaker for every six people who register for your gathering.
- If you're holding the gathering on Zoom, you'll need a **Zoom maestro** who assigns facilitators, notetakers, and participants to breakout rooms and handles other Zoom-related issues that arise (muting speakers, monitoring the chat, etc.)

Note that if you lack volunteers, multiple roles can be filled by the same people. Just be sure to designate all roles beforehand.

PLANNING

- **Pick a date and time** for your gathering, and decide whether it will be held remotely or in-person.
- **Spread the word** to those you wish to invite, asking those interested to **register** for the gathering. We recommend closing registration no later than 3 days before the date of the conversation.
- Once you have a complete count of registrants, **recruit enough facilitators and notetakers** so that you can break comfortably into small groups of no more than six participants.
- Once you're recruited these volunteers, **send an email to volunteers to help them prepare**. Attached to the email should be the [Facilitator's Guide](#) and the [Notetaker's Guide](#). Here's a draft of the email you can use – feel free to adapt as needed:

Dear Synod Volunteer,

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a facilitator or notetaker for our spiritual conversation taking place on DATE. Here is some information about how things will proceed:

- The session begins at TIME. Please join us 15 minutes earlier so that we can run through a few details. [IF ON ZOOM: A link to the Zoom is here; other details about connecting to the Zoom (including phone dial-in options) can be found further below.

ZOOM LINK HERE]
- We currently have XX people registered for the gathering, but we anticipate our actual numbers are likely to be somewhat lower. We will assign participants, facilitators and notetakers to small groups based upon who arrives.
- Two documents are attached; we ask that you scan them before we meet on Sunday:
 - Synod Facilitator's Guide
 - Synod Notetaker's Guide

We look forward to being with you!

- Three days or so before your gathering, **send an email to those registered** with logistics (including a Zoom link if you are meeting remotely). Attached to the email should be the [Participant's Preparation Guide](#). Here's a draft of the email you can use – feel free to adapt as needed:

Dear friends,

We very much look forward to your joining us for a spiritual conversation about our journeys with the Church as part of the Global Synod on DATE. Our gathering will last about 90 minutes.

- The gathering will take place [AT LOCATION/ON ZOOM]. [IF ON ZOOM: A link to the Zoom is here; other details about connecting to the Zoom (including phone dial-in options) can be found further below.

ZOOM LINK HERE]

- To prepare yourself for our gathering, see if you can find a bit of time beforehand to dwell with the questions we will be discussing in our spiritual conversation. Attached you will find a brief guide to help you prepare.

Faithfully, XXX

GATHERING

The gathering proceeds as follows; below each of these components will be discussed in turn.

- 1. Welcome and Opening Prayer** (convener, 5 mins)
- 2. Overview of Synod and Synodality** (convener or video, 10 mins)
- 3. Reading and Affirming Ground Rules** (convener, 3 mins)
- 4. Synod Preparatory Examen Prayer** (Examen leader, 10 mins)
- 5. Spiritual Conversations in Small Groups** (60 mins)
- 6. Reassemble; Naming the Graces** (convener, 2 mins)
- 7. Closing Prayer** (convener, 2 mins)

1. Welcome and opening prayer (convener, 5 mins)

The convener warmly welcomes all assembled and offers an opening prayer of their choice.

2. Overview of Synod and Synodality (convener or video, 10 mins)

This component of the gathering is meant to provide participants with a better understanding of the Global Synod and why we undertake this process. Here you have two choices about how to proceed:

- SFX Director of Adult Formation Bob Choiniere has created a 10-minute video presentation on the topic designed precisely for this purpose. If it's possible to show those gathered this video, it is strongly encouraged.

- A link to the video is here: <https://bit.ly/3CndGwV>

- *If you lack the capacity to show the video, the convener can read the following information, which is a very short description of the Synodal process:*

In October 2021, His Holiness, Pope Francis, opened a worldwide synod process. A synod is a gathering of bishops on a universal level under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discuss and decide on matters of the Church's life and mission.

Pope Francis has invited every Catholic and all people of good will to play a foundational role in this unique moment of listening and learning. The intention of the Synod, as Pope Francis states, is to "inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make hope flourish, stimulate trust, bind up wounds, build bridges, enlighten minds warm hearts and restore strength to our hands." Through our conversation, we participate in the discernment of the will of the Holy Spirit who is here with us now wherever two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus.

This synod conversation is an invitation to listen deeply to one another and discern how God is calling us to journey together more closely as Church. The aim of the conversation is simply to be present to the Holy Spirit and to one another. Following our conversation, the notes that are taken will be shared with the Pastoral Council who will pull together the parish's submission to the Synod. The notes will not contain the names of any individual participant. We will forward it simultaneously to the Cardinal, Papal Nuncio and Vatican Secretary for the Synod. In addition, a report will be prepared for the parish about what we've heard and learned.

3. Reading and Affirming Ground Rules (convener, 3 mins)

The convener then reads the following to all gathered:

Here are some principles and values that will guide our spiritual conversations today.

- **We own our experiences.** We are sharing direct, personal experiences in the Church, particularly experiences of the heart and spirit—joys, affirmations, sorrows, challenges. We are the only experts of our own experiences, and so we are not here to debate, defend or argue about beliefs, practices or doctrine.
- **We listen with open hearts.** We are listening with attentiveness and openness to others' experiences and stories, and we are allowing these stories to touch our hearts. We are not expected to solve any problems nor defend positions. This is not a time for correcting others or feeling obliged to teach others.
- **We create and hold a sacred space.** People are sharing the fruits of their prayer and aspects of their spiritual journeys. Participants are invited to enter this space with reverence and to be open to the presence of God in our midst.
- **We create and hold a safe space.** Participants' words are heard with respect, kept confidential, and not judged nor criticized. Likewise, we respect others, especially those who are particularly vulnerable or wounded.

These principles summarized in ground rules that conveniently spell out the word RESPECT:

R: take **RESPONSIBILITY** for what you say and feel, and speak with words others can hear and understand

E: use **EMPATHETIC** listening, not just words but also feelings being expressed, non-verbal language including silence

S: be **SENSITIVE** to differences in communication styles

P: **PONDER** what you hear and feel before you speak

E: **EXAMINE** your own assumptions and perceptions

C: keep **CONFIDENTIALITY**.

T: **TRUST** the process because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong but to experience true dialogue. While each person is speaking, the others listen. No one may interrupt the speaker or jump in to speak without being invited by name.

Close this discussion by asking all gathered to signal their agreement (thumbs up, nod of the head, "yes" in Zoom chat, etc.) to abide by these ground rules.

4. Synod Preparatory Examen Prayer (Examen leader, 10 mins)

The Examen leader then leads those gathered in a guided Examen to prepare everyone's hearts for the process using the following script.

To prepare for prayer and our important conversation today, please find a comfortable and relaxed position, close your eyes, [IF ON ZOOM: feel free to turn off your screen if that will help you enter into a space or posture of prayer]. Use these next few moments to focus on just your breathing... notice your heartbeat, any subtle movements in your body, and allow yourself to simply be in awe of the gift of Life... As thoughts, concerns, or distractions come up during this sacred time, gently acknowledge them, and let them pass. (pause)

Today, as we gather to intentionally listen and share, to learn, and to reflect on how we are called, collectively and individually, to be and to build Church, let us take a moment to just be who we are before God...God calls us to show up just as we are, however we are able, and to trust that God will meet us there.... (pause)

Let us pray: "In the name of the Lover, the Beloved, and the Love Between Them".

God, we ask that you enter into this important conversation with us today. Help us to be courageous, open, and vulnerable, so that we are able to take a compassionate and honest look at how we journey together as Church.

- I invite you to tap into your imagination...When you hear the word "Church", what comes to mind? ... (pause)
- Now, think of a joyful or life-giving memory that you've had with your Church community. Remind yourself why this memory is so important to you...Where is God in this memory? (short pause) Take a moment to offer up a prayer of gratitude for this experience. (pause)
- I invite you to lean into the full reality of our Church today. Where have you experienced hurt or disappointment on this journey?
- Where are you struggling to find peace in the Church? (pause)
- Ask yourself - how am I feeling?. Offer those feelings up to God.

- Think about a Church that welcomes, empowers, and accompanies all God's people: (short pause) What do you think of? What do you imagine? (pause)
- How might God be calling us to heal as a Church? How can we learn to better walk with one another to build and to be Church differently?" (pause)

We now close our Examen with a prayer...

God, our Creator, remind us of our mission, and inspire us to bring our gifts of love and service to all Your human family. May we know once again that we are not isolated beings but connected and belonging, in mystery and miracle, to God, to this Church, and to each other.

Amen.

(This Examen is an edited and based on an Examen prepared by Linh Nguyen Center of Faith Justice.)

5. Spiritual Conversations in Small Groups (60 mins)

If on Zoom: during the proceeding minutes, the Zoom Maestro assigns all those gathered into small groups of no more than six participants plus a facilitator and a notetaker using the breakout room feature.

If in person: the convener divides participants into small groups of no more than six participants plus a facilitator and a notetaker.

Once broken into small groups, facilitators follow the script in the [Facilitator's Guide](#) to conduct the conversation. Notetakers use the [Notetaker's Guide](#) to take notes on what they hear.

6. Reassemble; Naming the Graces (convener, 2 mins)

Once all have reassembled, the convener says:

During this conversation, we have shared rich experiences of faith. We have discussed how we have journeyed together as Church and how we might do so even more faithfully in the years to come. In thanksgiving for the gift that this conversation has been, I invite you to think of a specific grace you received or an insight you gained from this experience.

(Pause)

I now invite anyone to share a grace received or an insight gained.

(Give all a chance to respond)

7. Closing Prayer (convener, 2 mins)

The convener closes with a prayer of their choice. Here's a prayer you might consider using or adapting:

Jesus our Friend and Teacher,

We give you thanks and praise for gathering us here today and for speaking to us.

Give us the grace to live in communion with you and with each other, to participate in the life of your Church, and to advance your mission in the world.

May all we say and do be guided by your Spirit, and may this Synod bear much fruit in your Church. We ask this in your most holy name.

Amen.

FOLLOW UP

- After the conversation concludes, you may find it insightful for all volunteers (convener, facilitators, notetakers) to remain gathered briefly to debrief on how the conversation went. What worked? What didn't? What surprised you? Were there any particular comments or experiences that require the follow up of a professional or pastoral staff? If so, determine a course of action.
- Notetakers are a vital part of the process. Encourage notetakers to distill what they heard and submit their notes to the Pastoral Council via the Google Form link in the [Notetaker's Guide](#). Ideally this should be done within 48 hours after the gathering concludes.

Questions? Email the Xavier Pastoral Council at pastoralcouncil@sfxavier.org.