

## **Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment**

### **Listening Sessions Tool-Kit <sup>1</sup>**

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, recently called for a “Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment” to take place in October 2018. The first of three preparation stages began in January when Pope Francis wrote a [Letter to Young People](#) and the Vatican released the [Preparatory Document](#) with questions for reflection. Dioceses are asked to answer these questions, in consultation especially with youth and young adults, Catholic and non-Catholic.

This period of consultation provides a key moment for our own diocese. With Pope Francis as a bridge of trust, we hope that this effort will become a moment to encounter the youth and young adults in the communities throughout our diocese. We believe that to understand the experience of youth and young adults, we need to first deeply listen to them, to their hopes, dreams, struggles and challenges. We believe we need to also invite parents to share their reflections, so that we understand the broader context of the daily lives of youth and young adults in our diocese.

To help us do this, we are asking that leaders in all parishes do three things:

1. Host at least <sup>2</sup> one Listening Session: a multi-generational gathering, including parents, young adults ages 18-29, and high school age youth, ages 14-18.
2. Widely promote and distribute the online survey to all youth, young adults and adults (e.g. parents, parish/school staff, parishioners, etc.).

Pope Francis asks us to reach out to both Catholics and non-Catholics. Parishes, schools, and groups are encouraged to identify ways to engage those not active in the Church in this process to better reflect the diversity of youth and young adults in our diocese.

3. Participate in the online survey yourself and encourage your pastoral staff to do the same. Submission deadline is August 15.

Leaders of various young adult groups already meeting in the diocese are also being invited to host their own Listening Session during a regular gathering, and to participate in the online survey.

Catholic high school principals and theology teachers are invited to use the outline of the Listening Session during a class period, allow students to participate in the online survey, and to participate in the online survey themselves.

To assist you in hosting a Listening Session and collecting feedback, the diocesan team has prepared the following resources included in this packet.

- Guidelines for Listening Sessions
- Listening Session Sample Outline and Checklist
- Prayer for the Synod
- Facilitation Tips
- Sample Sign-in Form

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Archdiocese of Washington DC. <http://sharewithfrancis.org>

<sup>2</sup> See under Guidelines on next page, the invitation to host multiple Listening Sessions.

For questions, please contact Mark Mann, director of family, youth and young adults, 616-243-0491 or [mmann@dioceseofgrandrapids.org](mailto:mmann@dioceseofgrandrapids.org).

### **Guidelines for Listening Sessions**

1. Groups may decide the proper amount of time needed for their Listening Session. In general, it is expected that 60 minutes be allotted for conversations with more time for introductions, prayer, and concluding remarks, and additional time if food is provided.
2. In most cases, it is recommended that parents, youth, and young adults will move into separate small groups per age, unless these groups already gather together naturally.
3. Since the subject of the Listening Sessions are primarily youth and young adults (ages 14-29), not younger adolescents. It is recommended that communities prioritize listening to the experience of high school age youth and young adults, as well as their parents.
4. Every person in your community has valuable insight to share. We ask parishes and groups to consider hosting multiple Listening Sessions to reach those who are not Catholic or are not regularly involved in church/a religion. Consider meeting at a neutral site or a place in your community where youth or young adults already gather, such as your district library or a restaurant.
5. Parishes will benefit from hosting parish-specific Listening Sessions, however, if desired, they may also host a multi-parish Listening Session, especially where parishes are clustered or collaborating.
6. Pastors or select leaders (e.g. staff, pastoral council members, etc.) are encouraged to be present and observe the Listening Sessions to show the parish investment in the process and to benefit from the perspective that youth, young adults, and their parents share.
7. Parishes, schools, and communities are welcome to host a Listening Session during already gathered events (young adult gathering, youth group, high school religion class, etc.) to solicit feedback from youth or young adults. We encourage you to include parents if possible.

## Listening Session Outline

### Sample Outline (90 Minutes):

1. Gathering/Food/Hospitality (20 Minutes)
2. Introduction and Opening Prayer (5 Minutes) –  
Sample scripts and official prayer included in this toolkit, see next pages
3. Listening Session Discussion (60 Minutes) –  
Questions for small group discussion included in this toolkit, see next pages
4. Closing Prayer (5 Minutes)

### Volunteers Needed:

- \_\_\_ Skilled facilitators, at least one for each grouping of parents, youth, and young adults
- \_\_\_ Note taker for each grouping of parents, youth, and young adults
- \_\_\_ Hospitality Team
- \_\_\_ Timekeeper
- \_\_\_ Opening and closing prayer leader

### Materials Needed:

- \_\_\_ Nametags
- \_\_\_ Sign-in Sheet
- \_\_\_ Copies of the Listening Session questions
- \_\_\_ Food/hospitality
- \_\_\_ Computer(s), tablet(s) or notepads
- \_\_\_ Recording device (optional)
- \_\_\_ Space set-up for small groups

**Introduction: Purpose of the Listening Session** (sample script)

- Pope Francis has called a gathering of bishops across the world (called a Synod) in October 2018 to discuss how the Catholic Church can better support youth and young adults in living their faith and discerning their mission in life.
- To help Pope Francis and the Bishops prepare for this Synod, they are asking both Catholics and non-Catholics across the world to share their experience.
- Not only will this Listening Session help Pope Francis prepare for the Synod, it will also help our local Catholic Church discern how we can better support youth and young adults on their journey of faith.

**To be announced at the end of the Listening Session:**

- There is an online submission form for those who were not able to make it today. Pope Francis wants to hear from not only Catholics but also non-Catholics as well. We ask that you share the link to the online survey with your friends who live in the area and ask them to share their experience with Pope Francis. The link is on the bottom of the prayer card you will receive as we leave.

**General Participant Data to Collect:**

Parish/School/Group: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Total # of participants: \_\_\_\_\_

# of parents: \_\_\_\_\_ # of youth (14-18): \_\_\_\_\_ # of young adults (18-29): \_\_\_\_\_

Coordinator Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Facilitator Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Notetaker Names: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Listening Session: Questions for Conversation**

### FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

*Form small groups per age group: high school age youth (14-18) and young adults (18-29). In asking a question, please choose the audience (“youth” or “young adults”) and ministry context (“parish” or “school” or “community”) that best reflects your setting.*

1. What are the biggest challenges you and your friends are facing?
2. What do you want to do to change the world for the better? How would you start?
3. What groups do you see engaging youth/young adults the best?
4. What can the Catholic Church learn from these groups?
5. What do you and your friends want from the Church?
6. Why do some youth/young adults drift away from the Church?
7. How has technology affected how you connect with the Church?
8. How can the Church better involve you?
9. What else would you like to share with Pope Francis?

Coordinators: please submit responses online at [www.dioceseofgrandrapids.org](http://www.dioceseofgrandrapids.org) before August 15.

## Listening Session: Questions for Conversation

### FOR PARENTS & FAMILY MEMBERS

*These questions refer to both youth and young adults (ages 14-29) who take part in Church programs, as well as those who do not take part or have no interest in participating.*

1. Among the youth/young adults you know, what are the biggest challenges they face today?
2. What groups do you see engaging youth/young adults the best?
3. What can the Catholic Church learn from these groups?
4. What do you want from the Church for the youth/young adults in your family/community?
5. Among the youth/young adults you know, why do you think some drift away from the Church?
6. Among the youth/young adults you know, how has technology affected how they connect with the Church?
7. What opportunities for participation exist for youth and young adults to take part in the life of your parish community? What other possibilities would you like to see?
8. What can families do to assist youth and young adults in discerning major life decisions (moral decision, job, college choice, marriage, priesthood, etc.)?
9. What can the Church do to assist youth and young adults in discerning major life decisions (moral decision, job, college choice, marriage, priesthood, etc.)?
10. What programs or resources would you like the Church to provide for you and others who help youth and young adults discern major life decisions?
11. Is there anything else you would like us to know about youth and young adults in your community?

Coordinators: please submit responses online at [www.dioceseofgrandrapids.org](http://www.dioceseofgrandrapids.org) before August 15.

**A Prayer in Preparation for the 15th Synod of Bishops  
on the theme “Youth, Faith and Discernment of Vocations”**

**All: Hail Mary!**

Reader 1: In every stage of your life, you accepted the Word and preserved it, pondering it in your heart.

**All: Full of grace,**

Reader 2: help us to discover - the way to listen as you listened, the courage that faith generates, the depths of discernment and a dedication to service.

**All: The Lord is with you!**

Reader 3: In your “lowliness”, you experienced our human weakness and difficulty in understanding the mysterious will of God. With you, we are called to live by an exodus from our self and the plans for our life by learning to trust and have confidence.

**All: Blessed are you among women.**

Reader 4: Recalling the “great things” which the Almighty accomplished in you, assure us that we are not alone, but fully loved and supported by the “fear not” of the Angel. You opened her heart to “Here I am”, and thus began the Gospel journey.

**All: Blessed is the fruit of your womb.**

Reader 5: Woman of Intercession, at the foot of the cross of your Son, and united to the beloved disciple, you again accepted the call to be fruitful and generate life in human history.

**All: Holy Mary, Mother of God,**

Reader 6: In your eyes, every young person can rediscover the beauty of discernment, and in your heart, every young person can experience the tenderness of intimacy and the courage of witness and mission.

**All: We entrust the synodal process to you.**

Reader 7: Pray for us that in the course of this process, the Church may deeply examine herself on how to accompany youth and young adults and that together, all may accept God’s call to the joy of love and the fullness of life.

**All: Amen.**

## **A Prayer for Young Adults**

Gracious and Loving God,  
Help us to be a light for all the world to see,  
in all the places we live and work.  
Let our light shine for all peoples:  
for our families,  
for our church communities,  
for our cultures and societies,  
for the economic and political systems,  
for the whole world.

Coming into the room where the disciples were gathered after the resurrection,

Jesus, your Son, said: "Peace be with you!" (Jn 20:21).

Make us bearers of Christ's peace.

Teach us the meaning of what was said on the mountain:

"Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they shall be called sons and daughters of God" (cf. Mt 5:9).

Send us, Father, as you sent your Son:  
to free our brothers and sisters from fear and sin.

We ask this of you, in Christ's name.

Amen.

## Listening Session Coordinator Tasks

- \_\_\_ 1. Invite youth, young adults, and their parents by widely publicizing the Listening Session(s) at Masses, through bulletins, email lists, social media, flyers on community bulletin boards (e.g. at the local grocery store or coffee shop) as well as, asking all parish leaders to invite the people involved in their ministries.
- \_\_\_ 2. Provide hospitality such as food and greeters to create a welcoming environment for participants who may not be active or know many people in the parish.
- \_\_\_ 3. Bring nametags to encourage conversation, especially for those who are new or not active.
- \_\_\_ 4. Ask participants to sign in; collecting participant's name and email, providing the option if they are interested in learning more about the survey results, and if they are interested in getting more involved in a local Catholic community.
- \_\_\_ 5. Identify skilled facilitators who can guide the conversation. See the Facilitation Tips in this tool kit. Pastors are encouraged to find either a trusted lay leader or an outside facilitator to facilitate the Listening Session(s) in order to help participants feel comfortable providing honest feedback.
- \_\_\_ 6. Identify a notetaker for the evening or consider recording the sessions and tasking someone with typing up the notes.
- \_\_\_ 7. Ask someone to be the timekeeper and to let the group know when they are halfway through and when they have five minutes left.
- \_\_\_ 8. Gather participants in small groups of 6-8 people so that everyone has an opportunity to talk. If you have multiple small groups, ensure that there is a notetaker and facilitator for each group. You may also encourage the small groups to share with the whole group after they respond to the questions.
- \_\_\_ 9. Welcome the participants, introduce yourself, and review the purpose of the Listening Session below in your own words.
- \_\_\_ 10. Begin with a prayer from the heart or short prayer calling on the Holy Spirit to bless the session. End with the prayer suitable for those gathered for the session, either the Prayer for the Synod or a Prayer for Young Adults (both are included in this toolkit).
- \_\_\_ 11. Follow up with the participants. Since the goal of the Listening Session is to encounter youth and young adults, parishes and groups are encouraged to consider how they can continue to invite the participants into deeper participation and leadership in the life of the parish. Send an email thanking them for coming. You may also consider asking parish leaders or parishioners to follow up with participants one on one to encourage their involvement in the parish and local youth/young adult communities.
- \_\_\_ 12. Submit your parish feedback online by August 15 at [www.dioceseofgrandrapids.org](http://www.dioceseofgrandrapids.org). It is the responsibility of the parish (not an external facilitator) to identify who will aggregate the feedback and submit the online form for your parish by the deadline date.

## Facilitator Tips

1. It is recommended that either a trusted local lay leader or outside facilitator be used to facilitate the Listening Session(s) in order to help participants to feel comfortable providing honest feedback.
2. Facilitators are encouraged to be present prior to the start of the session to informally get to know the participants as they arrive.
3. Ask the participants to introduce themselves to the group and share how long they have been involved in the parish.
4. Remind the participants about the timeline for the discussion and that there is a timekeeper to help keep us on track.
5. Ask that participants...listen actively to what others say, share their experiences freely, respect the experiences of others without judgement, and consider the experience of their friends who are Catholic and those who are non-Catholic.
6. Redirect the conversation, if necessary, if the discussion goes off-track.
7. Call participants by name (nametags will help!).
8. Encourage the participants to share more thoughts online, especially if you were not able to make it through the questions or if some people did not have an opportunity to share.
9. Follow up after the Listening Session with the Listening Session Coordinator (e.g. pastor or parish youth ministry leader) if some participant shares something personal that he/she would have liked to talk more about. In that way, the appropriate parish/school staff person can follow up with the participant.
10. End on time.