

Training of Small Group Leaders



FOR THE SYNOD PARISH GATHERINGS

An Invitation



Pope Francis is inviting all Catholics, the baptised and anyone of good faith all across the world to take part in a prayerful reflection, listening and sharing, so that we can better hear the voice of God's Spirit to help direct the Church into the future. This listening phase will lead to a meeting of Church Leaders for a Synod in Rome in 2023.

Synod simply means 'journeying together' and there have been many synods since the time of the early Church. The Universal Synod next year will focus on how we can journey together more, or be more synodal, as a Church going forward .

We are also hoping that this listening will help with a National Synod here in Ireland which is due to take place in the next 4 or 5 years.

The Logo



The Logo for this phase of the synodal journey (or pathway) in the Dublin diocese reflects Pope Francis' words that 'we are all the same boat':

- The lighthouse represents the guiding light of the Holy Spirit who guides us on our way
- The boat represents the Church, the People of God, journeying together
- The water represents the waters of baptism and the equality of all the baptised

More information and resources are available on the diocesan website

www.dublindiocese.ie/synod

Parish Gatherings



Each parish, or grouping of parishes, is being asked to invite people to 2 Gatherings. We are especially being asked to invite those who do not normally come to Mass regularly.

At each of the Gatherings, people will be invited to share their responses in small groups to 2 questions. People will then be asked to write down their responses. We hope this sharing will help us to listen to what the Spirit of God might be saying to the Church

Questions for First Gathering:

- **When you think of your experience of Church, what brings joy?**
- **When you think of your experience of Church, what brings sorrow?**

Questions for Second Gathering:

- **When you think of your experience of Church, what brings hope?**
- **When you think of your experience of Church, what brings fear or anxiety?**

Format of the Parish Gatherings



Each Gathering will follow a similar format:

- Moments of Welcome – Reflection – Invitation – Prayer
- First Question of the Gathering – Personal reflection then Small Group Sharing
- Break
- Prayer/Scripture Moment
- Second Question of the Gathering – Personal reflection then Small Group Sharing
- Moment of Thanks
- Our Father and Sign of Peace

Role of the Animator



The Diocese has offered training to 2 people in the parish who will help to plan and lead the Listening Gatherings. They are called Animators

Before the Gatherings

Along with the Parish Team and PPC, they are responsible for organising the Gatherings and helping to prepare the small group leaders.

At the Gatherings

They will guide people through the process of the Gathering and will hand over to the Small Group Leaders during the time allocated to sharing in small groups.

The Animators are also available during the small group time to help if you feel you are getting into difficulty or need extra support.

After the Gatherings

They will coordinate a group to help collate the written responses and to draw up a report for the parish and for the diocese. (Some of the small group leaders may be asked to assist with this too.)

Role of the Small Group Leader



Before the sharing begins in the small groups:

Try to create a sense of welcome in the small group

Remind people of the “ground rules” of **Listening to understand, Appropriate sharing and Confidentiality** (*see following slides*)

During the sharing:

Keep an eye on time - make sure everyone has the chance to speak

Don't interrupt a person with questions/clarification etc. - let them speak

Thank the person (by name) and perhaps pause for a moment to honour the sharing before inviting the next person to share

Listening to Understand



This might be a new way of listening for us and those in the small groups.

- **NON-JUDGEMENT**

When we are listening to understand we do not make judgments. We listen to accept. We know the privilege of being trusted with the other person's story.

- **STAY WITH SILENCES**

Silence helps dialogue to happen. Slowing down helps us to focus. When someone is sharing give them space to be quiet. Don't be afraid of silences and fill them with unneeded words.

- **CHECK OUT**

If unsure about what is shared gently check out your own understanding. Listening to understand means checking out how others feel. Noticing emotion helps us to understand each other better.

- **DON'T RUSH TO SOLVE**

Rushing to solve the others' problems or issues can shut down all sharing, Check yourself to see if its your discomfort you are responding to!

- **ACCEPT HIGH EMOTIONS**

In deep sharing like dialogue emotions can be strong. The best way to acknowledge emotions is to allow them to happen in an atmosphere of acceptance.

- **ACCEPT YOUR OWN POWERLESSNESS**

Don't rush to sort things for the person sharing. In dialogue we are not trying to solve problems, we are just trying to be pilgrims together, simply listening.

Appropriate Sharing



The advice from the Diocesan Safeguarding Service is that public gatherings are not a suitable venue for people to disclose personal or family experiences of abuse.

We would further advise that, when people are expressing opinions on the topic of abuse within the Church, they bear in mind that this has impacted on the lives of many, some of whom may be present at the meeting they are addressing.

Should anyone wish to make a disclosure it would be more appropriate to do that at a break/end of the Gathering. Animators and members of the Parish Team should have numbers of people and organisations to help support someone in this situation.

Confidentiality



Pope Francis really wants people to feel free to share with integrity and kindness. Part of creating an atmosphere of freedom is to ensure people respect what is being said and who is saying it.

Confidentiality in the small group means that any sharing after the meeting must not be attributed to a particular person.

So it would be okay to tell others after the meeting about the kinds of things that were shared (in general terms) but not to say who said what – or to tell others in a way that they can easily identify who might have said it.

What to do if...

a person is talking to much...

Gently interrupt them and remind them that time is limited for the sharing. Thank them for their contribution and invite the next person to share.



“I’m sorry to interrupt you (Name) but due to time constraints I’m afraid we are going to have to move on to the next person. Thank you for what you have shared.”

What to do if...

a person hasn't spoken...

Gently invite them to share if they would like to. Remember this in an invitation so people do not have to share if they choose not to.



“(Name), would you like to share your response to the question?”

What to do if...

a person starts wandering off the topic of the question ...

Remind them of the question we have been asked to share on (it should be displayed on the screen) and try to keep them on track



“Thanks for what you’ve shared so far, could I just remind you that we are all being asked to share on our experience of (restate the question from the screen)”

What to do if...

a person starts sharing something inappropriate or begins making a disclosure...

You may need to interrupt them and remind them that this is not an appropriate space to make a disclosure and that they can speak to you (or an Animator or member of the Parish Team) who will be able to point them in the direction of further help and support.



“I’m sorry to interrupt but I just wanted to remind you that this may not be the best place to share this. I’d be happy to talk with you at the break/end of the evening. Thank you.”

What to do if...

a person gets upset/angry ...

Don't be frightened of emotion - sharing on our experience can be an emotional thing. Give them some time, encourage them that what they are feeling is OK, perhaps suggest we come back to them when they've had a chance to compose themselves.



“Take your time”

“Would you like to take a moment and we can come back to you?”

Writing the Responses



Use a different colour of Post-It Note for each of the questions.

Please be aware of any member of the group who may be struggling to write, for whatever reason.

You may wish to offer to write for them as they dictate their response to you.

Possible Dry Run of a Gathering



It may be helpful to have a dry run of a Gathering before the actual events

This could involve some 'role play' where you can practice some of the techniques of leading a small group.

Remember, most people will have come wanting to share so your main role is simply to manage the time and make sure everyone has a chance to share.

MOMENT OF WELCOME

- A warm welcome to everyone
- We are all in the same boat – learning this together
- Simple format for the evening
- Listening to understand
- The theme for this evening is: Sharing our Hopes
and Fears



MOMENT OF REFLECTION

Why are we here?

- To continue our listening and sharing
- To listen more deeply
- To journey with each other
- To respect the contribution of each one
- To learn from each other
- To be open to the Holy Spirit



MOMENT OF INVITATION

Once again you are warmly invited to:

- Speak from the heart
- To listen deeply to one another
- To share your experience
- To understand one another
- To listen to God's Spirit



MOMENT OF PRAYER



We begin our evening in prayer:

Using the ancient 'Adsumus Sancte Spiritus' – a prayer used for centuries at Church gatherings

A prayer that calls upon the Holy Spirit, inviting the Spirit into our conversations, opening us up to the way the Spirit works

Let us stand to pray together slowly and deliberately:

Synod Prayer

We stand before you, Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful; do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path nor partiality influence our actions.

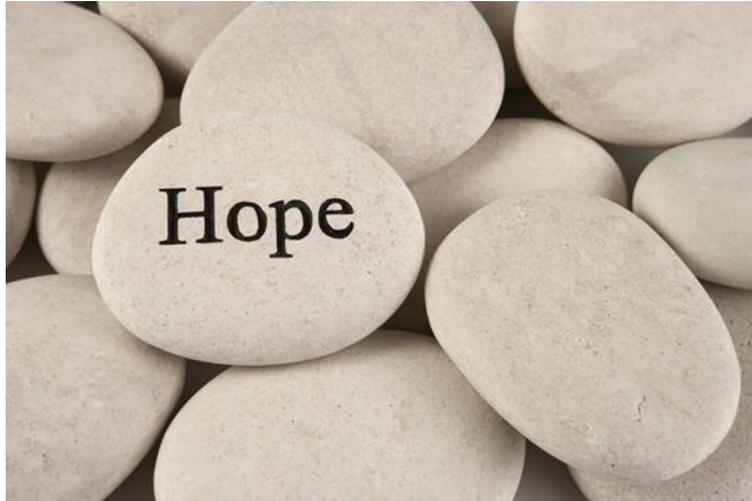
Let us find in You our unity so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth and what is right.

All this we ask of You, who are at work in every place and time,
In the communion of the Father and the Son, forever and ever.

Amen



Let us now listen to this piece of Scripture from the letter to the Romans (15:13)



“May the God of **hope**
fill you with all joy and peace in
believing,
so that you may grow rich in
hope,
by the power of the Holy
Spirit”

1st QUESTION FOR THIS EVENING

When you think about your experience of Church, what brings hope?

You are invited to reflect quietly about this before you respond

Music will play as we sit quietly



IN SMALL GROUPS



Your small group leader will invite you to share on the question:

When you think about your experience of Church, what brings hope?

Allow each person time to share

Listen to understand each other

When everyone has shared take time to write down, on a Post-It note, what you shared

Groups invited to display the Post-It notes around the walls of the meeting space

TEA BREAK



An invitation to get a cuppa before we move on to our second question



You can walk around and view what people have written in the POST-IT notes



Music will play to call us back to our groups and settle into the quiet once more

BACK TO SMALL GROUPS – A SCRIPTURE REFLECTION



From the Gospel of John:

“Now when evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started to cross the lake to Capernaum.

It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. By now a strong wind was blowing and the sea was getting rough.

Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they caught sight of Jesus walking on the lake, approaching the boat, and they were frightened.

But he said to them, “It is I. Do not be afraid.”

2nd QUESTION FOR THIS EVENING

When you think about your experience of Church what makes you anxious or fearful?

You are invited to reflect quietly about this before you respond

Music will play as we sit quietly



IN SMALL GROUPS



Your small group leader will invite you to share on the question:

When you think about your experience of Church, what makes you anxious or fearful?

Allow each person time to share

Listen to understand each other

When everyone has shared take time to write down, on a Post-It note, what you shared

Groups invited to display the Post-It notes around the walls of the meeting space

MOMENT OF THANKS

As we end this second listening experience I invite you to listen carefully to these words

(Quote from Gaudium et Spes 1)

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.



Thank you

For taking part

For listening well

For sharing openly

For taking the risk of opening your heart

Let's pray the "Our Father" the prayer that unites us



Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come,
thy will done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us
and lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

Finally, I invite you to share a sign or gesture of PEACE.....