

# What is Conversation in the Spirit?

“Conversation in the Spirit” is the method of relating to each other that the Vatican suggests for synodal meetings.

## Is this like a town hall meeting?

Americans tend to think in a **political** model: we gather to air disagreements, debate them and take a vote. Pope Francis asks us to leave behind the idea that there will be “winners” who get their way and “losers” who do not. On the contrary, the Synodal process is a **spiritual** one. It is oriented not toward debate, but toward **discernment**: “We listen to each other, to our faith tradition, and to the signs of the times in order to discern what God is saying to all of us.” [Vatican Synod Handbook] When we meet in spiritual conversation, we can speak with candor about our own experience, but we must also realize in humility that the experience of others has an equal validity. We listen deeply to them. Then, in prayer, we open ourselves together to the Holy Spirit for guidance.



## What might this look like?

Here is one model. Adaptation to your circumstances is encouraged!

In a small group, ask a reflective question that draws forth relevant experiences.

- 1 minute of silent reflection
- each person has an opportunity to share for 2 minutes; no discussion

“What moved within your mind and heart as you heard others speak?”

- 1 minute of silent reflection
- 1 minute of sharing per person; no discussion

“What do you think the Holy Spirit is calling us to do?”

- 1 minute of silent reflection; no discussion
- 1 minute of sharing per person

THEN, open discussion, with notes taken on the fruits of the conversation.

## Attitudes that help

Spiritual conversation is fostered by relating to each other in *contemplative* ways. What might this mean?

*When you first speak . . .*

Speak from your experience, not your opinions. Be brief; share what matters and then stop.

*As you listen . . .*

Listen with receptivity; suspend judgement. Be reverently present, with genuine curiosity about the experience of others.

Look at the person who is speaking. Receive the impact of another’s words. Avoid crosstalk.

Don’t think of what you will say next.

*As the exchange continues . . .*

Focus on what is between us, moving from “I” to “We.”

Notice what is arising in the present moment. Make connections, creating something new together from what has been offered.

Slow down.

Don’t fear silence; let thoughts emerge from it. Speak to the center rather than to an individual.

Open yourselves to “the transformative power of communal wisdom.” (quotation from Liz Sweeney, CSJ)

# Conversation in the Spirit

A dynamic of discernment in the synodal Church



Synod 2021-2024



Silence and prayer  
listening to the Word of God

## "Taking the word and listening"

Each person takes turns speaking from his or her own experience and prayer, and listens carefully to the contribution of others.

Silence and prayer



Silence and prayer

## "Building together"

Together we dialogue on the basis of what emerged earlier in order to discern and gather the fruit of the conversation in the Spirit: to recognize intuitions and convergences; to identify discordances, obstacles and new questions; to allow prophetic voices to emerge. It is important that everyone can feel represented by the outcome of the work. "To what steps is the Holy Spirit calling us together?"

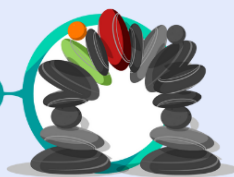
## PERSONAL PREPARATION

By entrusting oneself to the Father, conversing in prayer with the Lord Jesus and listening to the Holy Spirit, each one prepares his or her own contribution to the question about which he or she is called to discern.



## "Making space for others and the Other"

From what the others have said, each one shares what has resonated most with him or her or what has aroused the most resistance in him or her, allowing himself or herself to be guided by the Holy Spirit: **"When, listening, did my heart burn within me?"**



Final prayer of thanksgiving

## Prayer for Guidance by the Holy Spirit

Lord, who grants us the gift of the Synodal path,

to be a Church living as God's Family that is inclusive, open, and welcoming. Send your Holy Spirit to breathe on us the desire to keep on in this synodal spirit,

where all the members of the community can express themselves honestly. Give us the grace of a sincere disposition to deep and fraternal dialogue, as a characteristic of the culture of Your Church.

Help us to overcome resistance to the novelty of this synodal way of being and living the Church.

Come Lord's Spirit!

Take us closer to the Heart of Jesus and be our guide as we walk together! Amen.

<https://www.prayforthesynod.va/en/monthly-day-of-prayer-for-the-synod-june-2023/>

Reflect upon your experience,  
and speak boldly about it.

Listen deeply to the experiences of others, allowing them to change you.

Open yourselves together to the guidance of the Spirit.

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Thanks to Anne Marie Hansen for ideas from her workshop on contemplative dialogue.



for further information  
[www.synod.va](http://www.synod.va)

