**Synod Spiritual Conversation Facilitator Tip Sheet**

**Dear Facilitators,**

Thank you! Thank you for helping in this Synodal process! In facilitating these spiritual conversations, you are creating sacred, safe spaces for people to share their experiences of journeying together in our Church, to respond to Pope Francis’ invitation to hear from ALL the People of God!

**Role of the Small group facilitator**

* **Welcome**. Create a welcoming and prayerful space for Spiritual Conversation
* **Script.** Follow the script closely for introduction, rounds of sharing, and evaluation
* **Guidelines**. Keep the conversation on track using ground rules
* **Timekeeping.** **Your Critical Role:** Be sure that each participant adheres to the time limit
* **Silence.** Observe times of prayerful silence between rounds and during the break
* **Notetaking**. If your group does not have an assigned note keeper, you may ask a member of the group to take notes. It may be hard for you to do it yourself. But you will want to get with your notetaker after this experience to add any input that might be helpful and go over the summary. Two heads are often better than one.

**Some Expectations for Spiritual Conversations:**

* **OWN Experiences**. The first round is a time to share one’s own direct, personal experiences in the Church, particularly experiences of the heart and spirit—joys, affirmations, sorrows, challenges.
* **Listening** **sessions**. In these sessions, 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.
* **Sacred spaces.** 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.
* **Safe spaces.** Participants should know and trust that their words will be heard with respect, kept confidential, and not judged nor criticized. Likewise, they will respect others, especially those who are particularly vulnerable or wounded.
* **Everyone is the expert in their own experience.**
* **Prayerful process.** It is hoped that all will have had time to pray on the key question in advance of this session. If not, the facilitator may arrange for that before starting the conversation. Also, between the rounds of sharing, we encourage a couple of minutes of silent prayer to allow time to listen to any interior movements in one’s heart and spirit.

It is **NOT** the place for:

* Debating, defending, or arguing
* Correcting others, feeling obliged to teach others, even if well-intentioned
* Counseling (Facilitators are not trained for this.)

**Possible problem situations and ways to address them**:

**Exceeding Time Limits**. The biggest challenge in facilitating is keeping all participants to the pre-determined time limits. We strongly encourage you to track the time, so that there is time for everyone to speak and to complete the rounds of sharing and final evaluation. You may want to establish a plan up front where you will say, “15 seconds to wrap up.” Or “I will raise my hand with 15 seconds left.” Then say, “*Thank you, let’s move to our next participant.*” Or, “*Sorry to have to interrupt you; your time is up. Thank you for your input, we need to move to our next participant so that everyone gets a chance to share*.”

* **Interrupting**. If a participant interrupts a speaker or jumps in before others have had a turn, you might say, “*We ask you to hold your responses until each participant has had a turn. There will be a chance to state what resonates with you later*.”
* **Non-experiential Inputs**. Despite having been told in the introduction to share their own personal experiences or feelings of joy, sorrow, disappointment, etc., some people may find this a difficult thing to do. Instead, they may express ideas, opinions, or judgements. In this case, you may decide to let them continue speaking so long as they are respectful of others; do be sure to keep them to the allotted time.
* **Pastoral Correction**. A participant may try to correct another participant or challenge them to debate an issue. In this case, gently interrupt this participant: “*I would like to acknowledge that you have a concern, but I want to remind you that this is a session for listening to one another’s’ experiences with openness and respect. Each person is the stating their perceptions and experience. It is not a place to judge, correct, or challenge another*.”
* **Strong emotion**. In general, a facilitator simply thanks each participant for sharing. It’s important not to value one input more than another. However, if someone is very emotional, you might feel it important to acknowledge that. You might say, “*Thank you for your sharing and for trusting our group here with your story.*”
* **Upset**. If a participant is visibly upset, it would be important to acknowledge that. You might say, “*I can see that this situation is upsetting for you. Since we won’t be able to resolve this here, would you like to speak with the moderator or someone after the session?*” Whether the response is yes or no, be sure to mention this situation afterwards to the moderator who can follow up as necessary.