



Spiritual Conversation Guide
for Synod 2024 Reflection Sessions
Archdiocese of Regina

The Synod Secretariat has asked all dioceses and eparchies to contribute to the work of the October 2024 session of the Synod by “deepening aspects of the Synthesis Report” while always being guided by the fundamental question “*How can we be a synodal Church in mission?*”

It is recommended that such events be held in person and that you consider employing the method of “Conversation in the Spirit” used during the Synod in 2023.

It is important that care be taken in determining the size and scope of such “reflection events.” The Synod Secretariat has emphasized that these events are not to be like the earlier “listening” events held in 2022 but should involve a more focused number of participants and themes.

The purpose is to facilitate deepened, prayerful reflection on your chosen two or three themes while ensuring participants do not lose sight of the guiding question: *How can we be a synodal Church in mission?*

In addition to sessions taking place in parishes and within various groups in the Archdiocese, the Archdiocese of Regina will be hosting three online sessions open to the general public. Check the Archdiocesan calendar at <https://archregina.sk.ca/calendar/> for details.

Personal Prayer in Preparation

Whether you are taking part at your parish, with other groups, or online, in the days prior to your small group conversation, please set aside some quiet time, perhaps 30 minutes to an hour, for reflection on the chosen themes taken from the 2023 Synthesis Report, titled *A Synodal Church in Mission*, <https://bit.ly/A-Synodal-Church-in-Mission>

It is not necessary to reflect on all the themes and their content. We suggest that you briefly review the suggested themes before focusing your attention on a single theme or perhaps even a single idea, point of convergence, matter for consideration, or proposal that captures your attention the most.

The themes from the Synthesis Report that we recommend are as follows:

Part I. The Face of the Synodal Church

Read and pray with sections 3 and 5.

Part II. All Disciples, All Missionaries

Read and pray with sections 8 and 9.

Part III. Weaving Bonds, Building Communities

Read and pray with sections 14 and 18.

After taking some time to read through these personal points of interest, turn your attention and imagination to the question of how the Church is being called to engage in the Mission of Christ. As you do so, you might reflect on the following questions;

- a) Where and in what ways do I see the Spirit present and moving among the people whose voices are heard in the sections you reflected upon?
- b) What opportunities are present?
- c) What obstacles might we face?

Either during or following this reflection, you may wish to jot down some notes on your responses. These points will be helpful as you consider what from your time of personal reflection you would like to share with others.

Listening Session Guide

You will need:

- A leader or team to facilitate the group gathering
- Facilitators for spiritual conversation in small groups (1/small group)
- A recorder in each small group to provide a written record of the main points of conversation.
- Pens and paper, largely for group recorders
- Copies of these materials at least for the leaders, facilitators and recorders.

Spiritual Conversation

Spiritual conversation focuses on the quality of one's capacity to listen as well as the quality of the words spoken. This means paying attention to the spiritual movements in oneself and in the other person during the conversation, which requires being attentive to more than simply the words expressed. This quality of attention is an act of respecting, welcoming, and being

hospitable to others as they are. It is an approach that takes seriously what happens in the hearts of those who are conversing. There are two necessary attitudes that are fundamental to this process: active listening and speaking from the heart.

The aim of spiritual conversation is to create an atmosphere of trust and welcome, so that people can express themselves more freely. This helps them to take seriously what happens within them as they listen to others and speak. Ultimately, this interior attentiveness makes us more aware of the presence and participation of the Holy Spirit in the process of sharing and discernment.

The focus of spiritual conversation is on the person to whom we are listening, on ourselves, and on what we are experiencing at a spiritual level. The fundamental question is: “What is happening in the other person and in me, and how is the Lord working here?”

Spiritual Conversation involves two key spheres;

a) Active Listening

- Through active listening, the goal is to try and understand others as they are. We listen not only to what the other person says, but also to what he or she means and what he or she might be experiencing on a deeper level. This means listening with a heart that is open and receptive.
- This way of listening is “active” because it involves paying attention to more than one level of expression of the other. In order to do so, one must participate actively in the listening process.
- We listen to the other while he or she is speaking, and do not focus on what we are going to say afterwards.
- We welcome, without judgment, what the other person says, no matter what we think about the person or what they have said. Each person is an expert on his or her own life.
- We must listen in a way that is “more disposed to giving a good interpretation to what the other says than condemning it as false” (*Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, no. 22).
- We must believe that the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the other person.
- Welcoming without prejudice is a deep way of welcoming the other in his or her radical uniqueness.
- Active listening is letting oneself be influenced by the other and learning from the other.
- Active listening is demanding because it requires humility, openness, patience, and involvement, but it is an effective way of taking others seriously.

b) Speaking from the Heart

- This means sincerely expressing oneself, one’s experience, one’s sentiments, and thoughts.

- It involves speaking about one's own experience and what one truly thinks and feels.
- We take responsibility not only for what we say, but also for what we feel. We do not blame others for what we feel.
- We share the truth as we see it and as we live it, but do not impose it.
- Speaking from the heart is offering a generous gift to the other, in return for being actively listened to.
- This process is greatly enriched by a regular personal practice of prayerful self-examen. Without a habit of discernment and knowledge of oneself and how God is present in one's life, one cannot actively listen or speak from the heart.

In summary, what are the desired attitudes for spiritual conversation?

- Listen actively and attentively.
- Listen to others without judgment.
- Pay attention not only to the words, but also to the tone and feelings of the one who is speaking.
- Avoid the temptation of using the time to prepare what you will say instead of listening.
- Speak intentionally.
- Express your experiences, thoughts, and feelings as clearly as you can.
- Listen actively to yourself, mindful of your own thoughts and feelings as you speak.
- Monitor possible tendencies to be self-centred when speaking.

Opening Prayer:

As a large group, you may wish to begin this time of listening using one of the following prayers:

God our Father,
let the Spirit you sent on your Church
to begin the teaching of the Gospel,
continue to work in the world
through the hearts of all who believe.
We ask this through our Lord, Jesus Christ, your Son,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
God for ever, and ever. Amen.

Or

God of Love and Mercy,
let the splendor of your glory come upon us,
and through the radiance of the Holy Spirit
let the brightness of Christ,
who is light from light,
shine in the hearts of those born again by grace.
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

Or

God of light, from whom every good gift comes,
send your Spirit into our lives
with the power of a mighty wind,
and by the flame of your wisdom
open the horizons of our minds.
Loosen our tongues to sing your praise
in words beyond the power of speech,
for without your Spirit
we could never raise our voices in words of peace
or announce the truth that Jesus is the Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
God for ever, and ever. Amen.

After this opening prayer, break into smaller groups of no more than 8 individuals each for Spiritual Conversation using the guide below.

Spiritual Conversation, Round 1

10 Second Check-in: Each person is invited to share one or two words that describe his or her interior state at that moment. e.g., nervous, excited, tired, positive, agitated, etc.

The facilitator then begins by inviting the group into silence. After a few breaths, you may say the following or something similar;

“I invite you to close your eyes for a few moments, and breathe in the presence of God...

Ask God to help you to focus on the voices, ideas, images, and other fruits of your time spent praying with the synod materials. Which of these ought to be shared today?”

Allow some time for quiet.

“Once you have settled on something to share, I would invite whoever feels comfortable to share briefly, (no more than 3 minutes). We will continue clockwise from that person

around the rest of the group. If you would rather not share at this time please feel free to simply say 'pass'."

NB: After a participant has shared, the facilitator may say a simple "Thank you." This both acknowledges that the individual has been heard and indicates that the next person is now free to share.

Once the last person has shared, and if any in the group had initially expressed a desire to pass, the facilitator may ask if any of those who passed would now like to share. Give a few moments of quiet (introverts in the group may need this) before moving on to the next part.

Brief Silence

The facilitator may say something like,

"Let us receive all that has been shared in silence, allowing the words of others to be received and settle within us. In this silence, we pay particular attention to how the words of others gathered here, affected us and the images and ideas their words have inspired."

Spiritual Conversation, Round 2

Participants share what emerged within them during the time of silence. No one is obliged to speak, and participants can share spontaneously without any particular order. *This is not a time for discussing or refuting what someone else says, nor for bringing up what participants forgot to mention in the first round.* Rather, it is an opportunity to respond to questions like:

- How was I affected by what I heard?
- Is there a common thread in what was shared? Is there something missing that I had expected would be said?
- Was I especially touched by a particular sharing?
- Have I received any particular insight or revelation? What is it?
- Where did I experience a sense of harmony with others as we shared with one another?

This second round enables the group to realize what unites them. It is here that signs of the action of the Holy Spirit in the group begin to manifest themselves, and the conversation becomes an experience of shared discernment.

Leave a small space of silence after this last reflective question and then continue;

"Once you have settled on what you feel called to share in this second round, I would invite whoever feels comfortable, to begin. We will continue clockwise from that person around the rest of the group. If you would rather not share at this time please feel free to simply say 'pass'."

NB: After a participant has shared, the facilitator may say a simple “Thank you.” This both acknowledges that the individual has been heard and indicates that the next person is now free to share.

Once the last person has shared, and if any in the group had initially expressed a desire to pass, the facilitator may ask if any of those who passed would now like to share. Give a few moments of quiet (introverts in the group may need this) before moving on to the next part.

Brief Silence

The facilitator may say something like,

“Let us receive all that has been shared in silence, allowing the words of others to be received and settle within us. In this silence, we pay particular attention to how the words of others gathered here, affected us and any common themes or ideas that seem to have emerged from this sharing.”

Spiritual Conversation, Round 3

In this final round, participants share what emerged from the preceding time of silence. They may also take note of the ways in which the Holy Spirit may be moving the group.

The facilitator may say something like,

“Let us receive in thanksgiving, all that has been shared today. How has the Holy Spirit been moving among us today? Of what should we take particular note?”

As in the previous rounds, the facilitator invites whomever is comfortable to begin sharing and then allows the sharing to continue clockwise from that person. As always, those who would rather not share are free to simply say “pass” when their turn comes.

Each person’s sharing is responded to by a simple “Thank you” from the facilitator. Once the final person has shared, be sure to check to see if any of those who previously passed, would now like to share. After a few moments to provide this opportunity, close with prayer.

Closing Prayer

The Facilitator may wish to offer a spontaneous prayer of thanks for the work of the Holy Spirit today or may close with a Glory Be, the Our Father, or Hail Mary prayer.

Review and Report: Finally, the group can briefly review and reflect on how the conversation proceeded, and decide on the main points they will report from the conversation. Be sure to have someone record these main points.