

## Who Facilitates Synodal Consultations: Choosing Facilitators

Good facilitation has participants engaging with one another in meaningful dialogue on the given topic or question. The facilitator is not the center of conversation but rather a guide for the conversation. It is important to select and train excellent facilitators for this listening process. Strong facilitators are people who:

- Are at home with their Catholic faith
- Are prayerful and reflective
- Have strong interpersonal skills
- Have effective communication skills
- Are willing participants in the synodal process
- Are able to maintain a “big picture” view without injecting their personal agenda
- Can focus a conversation
- Can connect participants with each other without becoming the center of the conversation.

It is important to select facilitators with the experience and competencies needed, depending on the nature and makeup of the group.

- Volunteers can usually facilitate parish, diocesan, religious order, movements, or similar synodal consultations
- A Catholic professional facilitator — or someone else with higher level facilitation skills — may be needed on occasion when participants come from marginalized groups (e.g., different ethnic or cultural groups, abuse survivors, youth, LGBTQ, persons with disabilities, migrants/refugees, etc.) or when special interest groups are participating in a particular consultation
- All facilitators need preparation and training on the synodal approach, the synodal purpose, and the synodal process.

## Facilitating a Synodal Consultation

As facilitator you will be asked to:

- Establish clear boundaries of time and topic for speakers
- Gently interrupt a speaker who talks disproportionately more than others
- Gently interrupt and redirect a speaker who gets off topic
- Gently re-focus a speaker who is preoccupied with an issue that is not pertinent to the topic or inhibits the participation of others in the group.



# Process for Facilitating Synodal Consultations

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## Practical Suggestions for Successful Facilitation

1. It helps to set ground rules and expectations at the start of the consultation by emphasizing the need for broad participation and safety. Some examples of boundary-related ground rules are:
  - One person speaks at a time and the others listen attentively
  - Discernment means speaking, listening and prayerfully reflecting so pausing in silence between speakers to consider what is said is a good approach
  - Speak when you can add to the conversation, not when you are trying to intentionally end it
  - Stay on topic
  - Keep your comments reasonably brief so others have time to participate
  - This is a forward-leaning conversation, so lean toward solutions
  - If someone offers a comment in the form of a complaint, ask the person to reframe her/his comment in the form of a hope or aspiration.
2. If you have to interrupt a speaker, it helps to acknowledge their contribution by providing a brief synthesis of what you heard them say and thank them for their contribution.

## Examples of Ground Rules for Synodal Consultations

1. This consultation is a safe place to talk — we will treat each other and what anyone says with reverence and respect.
2. One person speaks at a time.
3. We all will listen with an open mind.
4. We will be stopping the conversation at certain intervals to reflect and pray.
5. Our primary mode is dialogue: When we speak our purpose is to advance the conversation. Please avoid arguing or comments that seek to advance a personal agenda.
6. We limit how long we speak so that everyone has time to share.
7. We only speak once until everyone has had an opportunity to share.
8. We will be reporting the themes and experiences to the (arch)diocese and bishop's conference as they emerge from the consultation discussions without indicating the names of individual participants.
9. As participants, when we tell others of our experience of the consultation, we will not attribute anything we share to particular people or groups.