

Dialogue, Discussion and Discernment for Facilitators

Dialogue is the foundation of all synodal consultations. Dialogue does not happen when there is arguing or diatribe. However, conflicting perspectives may be presented. We may not all agree upon what is discussed in the synodal consultation, but we all acknowledge that what we discern through this process has the potential to be the will of God for the Church in the future.

It is helpful to distinguish between the different types of exchanges:

- **Dialogue** is two way, cooperative, and its purpose is to build relationship and exchange perspectives between participants
- **Discussion** is a process of talking about something in order to reach a decision or to exchange ideas
- **Debate** is two way and competitive, where the purpose is to convince another
- **Diatribe** is one way and its purpose is to browbeat, inspire, shame or emote.

Dialogue comes before discussion in synodal exchanges. These two activities can lead to true discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying and leading.

- Dialogue expands possibilities and insight into possibilities
- Discussion holds those possibilities against one another, helping to reflect upon them, and narrowing toward realistic, doable solutions, and steps forward.

Practical Suggestions for Dialogue, Discernment, and Discussion

As facilitator, you will help the group engage in dialogue on the topic until they make an explicit decision to move into discussion. It is okay for you as facilitator to ask the group to stop talking for a short period of time in order to reflect and pray about the dialogue before moving to discussion.



Process for Facilitating Synodal Consultations

- A facilitator can help stimulate discussion by offering to synthesize the comments made from time to time or when the flow of conversation seems to be stuck
- A facilitator helps the group by holding them in discussion until a pattern of recurring themes are emerging and making an explicit decision to move into prayerful discernment
- Discernment begins in prayer: “Your will, not mine”
- A facilitator can call the group to prayer for guidance by the Spirit, to sharing reflections on what they see as emerging in the dialogue and discussion
- A facilitator can call upon the group to share the themes that they hear surfacing and that they believe should persist into the future of the local and universal Church as a result of this consultation
- Likewise, a facilitator can call upon the group to name ideas or topics they have heard that they believe should not persist into the future local and universal Church
- A facilitator can name any yet unresolved issues or topics that may need to remain unresolved
- A facilitator can call upon the participants to detail what sticks out to them as a result of the consultation, ways to be in stronger communion with one another, ways to participate more fully in the life of the Church, or ways to be more missionary.