

Synodal Leadership Formation Course: Facilitator Guide and Session Content



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Synodal Leadership Invitation

Thank you for your decision to facilitate formation sessions on synodal leadership. This Facilitator Guide and Session Content is designed to provide you with the information and tools to deliver this course.

Through this course, participants will experience synodality and learn skills associated with its practice. The principles and skills contained in this Guide are applicable to many types of relationships in life: family, social, civic, organizational, and pastoral.

The contents of this Guide offer the opportunity to pray, co-learn, practice, and experience ways to interact in a more synodal manner. Beneficial for use in a variety of settings – including as a “train-the-trainer” tool – these materials will help support and grow a more synodal Church.

Introduction

Synodal Leadership

Synodality is an approach to discerning where the Holy Spirit is leading the Church. While the synodal form of leadership dates back to the first century of the Church (see Acts 15: 1-21), today we reflect on how to effectively practice it in today’s world.

“Since the first centuries, the word “synod” has been applied, with a specific meaning, to the ecclesial assemblies convoked on various levels (diocesan, provincial, regional, patriarchal or universal) to discern, by the light of the Word of God and listening to the Holy Spirit, the doctrinal, liturgical, canonical and pastoral questions that arise as time goes by.”¹

“Although synodality is not explicitly found as a term or as a concept in the teaching of Vatican II, it is fair to say that synodality is at the heart of the work of renewal the Council was encouraging.”²

Synodal leadership (a style of leadership in which we “walk together”) is a way to “widen the tent” and include a larger number and broader representation of people in the discernment process and in decision-making. This Synodal Leadership Formation Course will help participants experience synodality as an inclusive form of leadership and learn ways of integrating synodal leadership skills into pastoral ministry and other aspects of their lives.

¹ International Theological Commission, Synodality In The Life And Mission Of The Church, March 2018, #4.

² Ibid, #6.

God invites us to follow Jesus as disciples, loving everyone, and witnessing goodness and justice. As disciples, we call upon the Holy Spirit to discern how to follow Jesus concretely, not abstractly. Disciples with leadership responsibilities also have to take into consideration their communities and the contexts in which they lead. The world around us is changing and becoming more complex, and increasingly polarized. The message of Jesus Christ is eternal and true, yet the way we *live* the message constantly evolves. We are not called to “do as we have always done,” but to discern what the Holy Spirit would have us do today.

As we seek the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, no leader alone can discern the best path for a community, nor have all the answers to the community’s challenges. Leaders must journey with their community members to tap into their collective wisdom and intelligence. The resources in this Facilitator Guide are developed to support leaders and their communities as they journey together and broaden the representation of those in the discernment process and in decision-making.

As the facilitator of this course, you are inviting people to go on this journey together with Jesus, as the disciples did on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:13-35). In this Facilitator Guide, you will find tools to help you both lead in a synodal way and guide their leadership formation process.

Course Overview

The following pages contain information on the six sessions of this Course, each with several methods for leading in a synodal way. The topics covered in the six sessions include:

- a. An introduction to synodal leadership
- b. Deep listening as a group – which develops the collective intelligence of groups, increases trust, and reduces polarization
- c. Communal discernment – which occurs when group members pray, reflect, and experience silence in one another’s presence (moving from “I” to “we”)
- d. Being open to transformation – which begins with knowing one’s own biases and the ability to listen without judgment
- e. Leading change through adaptive leadership – which involves reviewing and adapting our approach to meet the needs of the people we serve in different contexts
- f. Cultural humility – which allows us to be more open to others and to increase our capacity to understand, love, and respond to everyone’s needs

How to Use this Guide

Review the six sessions and be familiar with the content and format. There are videos and reading materials for participants to watch/read to prepare for the upcoming session that you will need to review as well. At the end of each session, participants identify something they will do in the time between sessions to practice a synodal principle. The presentation during each session is brief to ensure that the formation occurs through experience rather than lectures.

The components of each session are:

- **Session Theme** - indicates the focus and content of the session.
- **Session Preparation** - provides materials (articles and videos) to read/watch in advance of the session to prepare participants for meaningful conversation.
- **Learning Objectives** - clarifies what the participants will achieve during the session.
- **Session Schedule** - presents how the session will progress and the timing for each activity.
- **Welcome/Overview** - sets the tone and orients the participants to the session.
- **Revisiting the Prior Session** - reminds participants of what was learned during the previous session and encourages accountability to their commitments to practice synodal principles.
- **Scripture Reflection** - connects synodal principles to scripture and the experiences of the participants.
- **Presentations** - helps participants to understand the synodal principles.
- **Periods of Silent Reflection** - allows participants time to reflect on the content of the session.
- **Breakout Discussion Groups** - allows all participants (when groups are larger than six participants) to be fully engaged through a small group experience. Breakout groups occur multiple times throughout each session.
- **Report Outs** - provides the opportunity for each breakout group to share one or two salient points and/or all participants to engage in large-group discussions.
- **Concluding Commitment** - engages participants in identifying one or two things from the session to practice as part of Action Learning.
- **Closing Prayer** - concludes the session.
- **Looking Toward the Next Session** - explains the theme and preparations for the next session.
- **Additional Resources** - provides additional resources for participants to deepen their understanding of the theme of the session.

Intended Audience

Synodal leadership can be implemented by any ministry group, parish, religious organization, diocese, or religious order. Volunteer groups, paid staff, pastoral or parish council, and senior leadership teams can all benefit. Groups that include a mix of laity, religious, and ordained participants are preferable, similarly are groups of participants of mixed ages. Groups can be as

small as three people or as large as 30 people. With larger groups, there will be times in each session to break into groups of two, three, or four people.

Be sensitive to who is in your group and how each session might need to be adapted. For example, in session six, when speaking about crossing cultural boundaries, if group members are from the dominant culture, such crossing is a less frequent occurrence than for people coming from a non-dominant culture who do so regularly. Another consideration: if the group members have had no prior experience in small group prayer and reflection, some additional introduction to those practices might be necessary.

Delivery of Materials

While each of the six sessions in this Guide is formatted for a two-hour experience (online or in-person), the materials can be reshaped for a multi-day retreat experience. We encourage you to be cognizant of time and not rush through the materials. The periods of silence and reflections are critical elements of the experience.

Sample slide decks, handouts, and support materials are available bilingually in English and Spanish for the six sessions on the course website: synodalleadership.org.



The session outlines in this Facilitator Guide will serve as handouts for participants during the Course. We encourage you to make them available (printed or through the website above) to participants in advance of the first session.

Preparing to Facilitate

After reviewing all the materials and before facilitating the first session, we encourage you to explain the materials and how you will use them to another person who has not seen them. It will help you understand them more thoroughly. We also encourage you to seek feedback on how effectively you are communicating the session components.

For groups that are held in-person, we encourage you to take steps to make the sessions feel welcoming. Think about the following items when you are hosting a local session:

- **Signage:** ensure signs are ample, easy to read, directive, and welcoming
- **Greeters:** recruit friendly greeters to welcome and guide participants to the location of the sessions, especially if your session is held in a place that may be hard to find
- **Materials:** provide name tags, pens, and handouts at each table or at the entrance
- **Facilities:** ensure that participants can easily locate the restrooms by using signage or greeters
- **Food/Beverage:** provide water, coffee, tea, and consider also some simple snacks

Facilitating a Session

Your gifts and talents as a facilitator will ensure that the conversations and activities outlined for each session will embrace the spirit of the synodality, stay on track, provide a meaningful opportunity for encounter, and generate important feedback.

As a facilitator, you are asked to:

- Establish clear boundaries of time and topic for presenters
- Gently interrupt a participant who talks disproportionately more than others
- Gently redirect a participant who is off-topic by acknowledging their contribution and thanking them for their contribution
- Gently refocus a participant preoccupied with an issue that is not pertinent to the topic or inhibits the participation of others in the group
- Set ground rules and expectations at the start of the session 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
- Stay on topic
- Listen with an open mind
- Only speak once until everyone has had an opportunity to share
- Keep comments reasonably brief, so others have time to participate.

Leading Spiritual Conversations

During the sessions, there are times for spiritual conversations that take various forms. Generally, spiritual conversations will follow the format below:

- Groups should be no larger than 6 people
- For in-person groups, participants are seated in a circle (at round tables if available)
- If held online, the conversation circle consists of breakout rooms of six people
- A topic for conversation is introduced
- The group members pray for about 5 minutes in silence in one another's presence
- **Round 1:** Each person speaks for 5 minutes without interruption (examples of sharing include: here's what I thought, what I felt, where I am on the matter). A timekeeper indicates when each speaker has one minute remaining.
- **Round 2:** Each person has three minutes to share their reaction to what resonated with them from Round 1, pausing for 30 seconds after each person has spoken. The first round was more focused on one's reaction to the topic, round two is about what we are hearing collectively.
- After each person has shared, take three minutes of silence to consider how one's thoughts and feelings may have changed after hearing people in Round 2.
- **Round 3:** Participants have 3 minutes to 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. Try to summarize the group thoughts. Is there any consensus, or is there a strong disagreement?

- A prayer of thanksgiving can conclude the conversation.

Committing to the Course

It's important for participants to know what they are committing to when taking part in the Synodal Leadership Formation Course.

The commitment required of participants includes:

- Taking part in all six sessions - The six sessions are 2 hours each (or equivalent time if done in a retreat setting).
- Completing about 45 minutes of preparation between sessions (such as watching a video, reading an article, or keeping a journal).
- Being actively engaged - These are active sessions with discussions, prayers, discernment, questions, and breakout group exercises.

Obtaining Participant Evaluation

As the facilitator, we encourage you to have your group participants evaluate their experience of the program at the end of session six. Please visit synodalleadership.org for sample evaluation forms.

Providing Feedback on the Course

We also encourage you to take time at the end of the course to reflect upon your experience as facilitator, together with the experience of your group. Once you have gathered the evaluation feedback from your group after session six, please visit synodalleadership.org to complete the facilitator debrief form. This will enable you to reflect upon the experience of your group and of your facilitating, and will also provide valuable feedback to those who are designing synodal leadership formation resources.



Session Handouts

Session 1 – Introduction to Synodality

Theme

Introduction to Synodality

Preparation

Before the first session of the Synodal Leadership Formation Course, please select a short scripture passage from anywhere in the Bible (no more than a few sentences) that relates to where you are on your spiritual journey. During the first session, you will have a few minutes to read the scripture passage and explain why the selection reflects something about you.

Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Learn about one another's interests and spirituality by listening openly to each scripture selection and personal story.
- Experience the movement of the Holy Spirit to guide our conversations in a group.
- Explore what synodality is and its surrounding misconceptions.
- Consider how to practice synodality in daily life.

Outline – 120 Minutes

- Welcome, Introductions, and Overview 15 Minutes
- Scripture Presentations 25 Minutes
- Debrief Scripture Presentations 10 Minutes
- Presentation 25 Minutes
- Breakout Groups Discussion 20 Minutes
- Report Outs 10 Minutes
- Conclusion and Closing Prayer 10 Minutes
- Looking to the Next Session 5 Minutes

Session 1 Content

Welcome, Introductions, and Overview – 15 Minutes

- Introductions
 - Each person introduces themselves, what organization they represent, and what they like to do on a day off work.
 - We will ask someone to go first, and then please invite the next person to share by name.
- Review the schedule for the session.

Scripture Presentations – 25 Minutes

The Lord speaks to us through the Word, silence, and experience. In the breakout groups:

- Each person reads a selected scripture passage and offers a two-minute reflection about how it applies to their life.
- Listen without comment to the other members of the group as they offer their reflections.
- After every person has offered a reflection, take 30 seconds of silence to reflect on what you heard and what stood out from their reflections.
- After the 30 seconds of silence, each person shares a few words in response to the reflections of the other members.

Debrief Scripture Presentations – 10 Minutes

Reflect upon the preceding process (the proclamation of Scripture, invoking the Holy Spirit through silent reflection in one another's presence, and listening to how the Holy Spirit is prompting us.)

A few people will be invited to share a reflection on the question: **How was that experience for you?**

Presentation – 25 Minutes

Synodal Process and Methods

Review of the synodal **process and methods** that will be used in the six sessions:

- Hospitality and welcome
- Extended listening and reflection
- Periods of silent reflection and communal discernment
- Checking biases and preconceptions
- Resources and journaling between sessions

As you listen, consider: How is God calling us to journey as a community focused on the mission to proclaim the Gospel of Christ more effectively?

Hopes for the Experience

Review the stated objectives of the Course.

- Experience ways to lead by utilizing the principles of Encounter, Listening, Discernment, Participation, and Accountability
- Integrate principles of synodal leadership into their organizational leadership culture
- Experience this leadership formation and possibly replicate within their network

We will emphasize WHAT synodality is (the topic of dialogue and discernment) and HOW synodality is practiced (key elements of synodality).

The Three Pillars of the Synodal Process

The synodal process represents a way that we are Church:

- Communion (Journeying Together)
- Participation (Co-Responsibility)
- Mission

The focus is to discern and identify ways the Holy Spirit is already at work among us, identify what may be lacking, who may not be at the table, and who we may need to hear from to go forward in faith.

As you listen, consider: How is God calling us to journey as a community focused on the mission to proclaim the Gospel of Christ more effectively?

Themes of the Sessions

Briefly explain the remaining themes the Course will touch on, as well as the objective for each theme.

- **Active Listening:** Understanding one another more fully through listening while withholding judgment
- **Communal Discernment & Participatory Decision-Making:** Experiencing the movement of the Holy Spirit to guide our conversations in a group
- **Paths to Transformation:** Becoming aware of our biases and assumptions for greater clarity in communication
- **Adaptive Leadership:** Reflecting on how leaders can address complex challenges and create new approaches
- **Building Bridges Across Diverse Communities:** Understanding the implications and the rich contribution of diversity and cultural differences

Breakout Groups Discussion – 20 Minutes

In your breakout groups, please share in response to what you heard about the themes, objectives, and methods of synodality. Please consider what insight you want to report back to the large group after your breakout session.

As you hear about how we will interact with one another:

1. What excites you about what you heard?
2. What are some potential limitations or challenges about what you heard?
3. What might be challenging for you personally?

Report Outs – 10 Minutes

A representative of each breakout group will share a few salient points from their discussion.

Conclusion and Closing Prayer – 10 Minutes

Concluding Question

Reflecting on your session experience, what is your key takeaway from today?

Closing Prayer

Does anyone have a prayer request, perhaps for someone you know who is struggling or someone who is celebrating a blessing?

Looking to the Next Session – 5 Minutes

Session Two: Active Listening

Reflection Assignment

Before the next session, read [Towards October 2024](#) (Synod document). Write some notes in answer to the two questions below and be prepared to share at the next session.



1. What are examples of co-responsibility, shared governance, and inclusive listening that you have observed in the Church?
2. What would you like to learn more about synodality?

Also - Please watch this short video:

[Levels of Listening - Otto Scharmer](#)



Session 2 – Active Listening for Synodal Leadership

Theme

Active Listening for Synodal Leadership

Preparation

At the end of the previous session, you were asked to read [Towards October 2024](#) (Synod document), write some notes in answer to the two questions below, and be prepared to share.



1. What are examples of co-responsibility, shared governance, and inclusive listening that you have observed in the Church?
2. What would you like to learn more about synodality?

Also - Please watch this short video:

[Levels of Listening - Otto Scharmer](#)



Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Get to know one another more
- Reflect on how Jesus listened to people on the margins
- Examine how they listen to others
- Consider how listening is essential to synodal leadership
- Learn to use a tool for deep listening
- Commit to listening more effectively in pastoral ministry or any other aspect of life

Outline - 120 Minutes

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| ● Overview | 5 Minutes |
| ● Revisit the Previous Session | 15 Minutes |
| ● Scripture Reflection | 20 Minutes |
| ● Presentation | 20 Minutes |
| ● Large Group Silent Reflection | 5 Minutes |
| ● Breakout Exercise of Deep Listening | 30 Minutes |
| ● Report Outs | 10 Minutes |
| ● Concluding Commitments | 5 Minutes |
| ● Closing Prayer | 5 Minutes |
| ● Looking to the Next Session | 5 Minutes |

Session 2 Content

Overview – 5 Minutes

- Welcome
- Review the objectives and agenda for the session

Revisit the Previous Session - 15 Minutes

In the large group, the facilitator will call upon a few people to respond to the document “Towards October 2024” and the questions below:

- What have you seen working well in social relationships, organizational structures, processes of discernment, and decision-making to promote shared responsibility for the mission of the Church?
- Based on your reading of “Towards October 2024”, what might occur if the Church more fully adopts synodality?

Scripture Reflection – 20 Minutes

Listen to the passage with closed eyes. This may help you listen more intently and avoid distraction.

The Healing of the Blind Beggar: Luke 18: 35-43

Now as he approached Jericho a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging, and hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” He shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!” The people walking in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent, but he kept calling out all the more, “Son of David, have pity on me!” Then Jesus stopped and ordered that he be brought to him; and when he came near, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He replied, “Lord, please let me see.” Jesus told him, “Have sight; your faith has saved you.” He immediately received his sight and followed him, giving glory to God. When they saw this, all the people gave praise to God.

Large Group Reflection Questions - 3 Minutes

1. Why did Jesus need to ask, “What do you want Me to do for you?”
2. How does the blind man represent people on the “side of the road” of society today?

Breakout Discussion Questions - 15 Minutes

In your breakout group, answer all three questions. Each group member should be allowed time to answer at least one of the following questions.

1. Who in your life do you wish you had listened to more, and why?
2. How would you describe the difference between passive and active listening?
3. Why might someone be afraid to listen deeply to others (below the surface of their words)?

Presentation – 20 Minutes

Synodality: Revolution in Listening

Pope Francis has called the Universal Church to an unprecedented process of listening to the People of God in the firm belief that God speaks through them.

Having Real Conversations

These are three ways Pope Francis calls the Church to be in deeper communion through synodality.

- *Listening, Not Lobbying:* Politics have invaded the Church. Synodality is not lobbying but listening and understanding people's situations. We are tempted to focus on what we will say in response instead of deeply listening to what the other person is saying. How can we hear the Spirit's call if we can't understand others in their situation? Practice listening; seek to understand.
- *Discerning, Not Voting:* Listen deeper and be attentive to what the Spirit might say through others. Listening and discerning must become the new normal if we are to be led by the Spirit in the Church. Consensus occurs when we can find a common interest or mission rather than holding to a personal opinion. In voting, there are "winners" and "losers."
- *Praying, Not Politicking:* The Synod is a gathering in liturgy and prayer. It requires an openness to the movement of the Spirit when we are gathered in prayer. It utters the prayer of Samuel: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." Synodality requires humility in place of defensiveness.

Setting The Conditions For Small Group Sharing

What conditions can we create for meaningful spiritual sharing space?

- Set an informal atmosphere of respect
- If necessary, offer confidentiality (emotional safety)
- Be present and fully embody attention
- Create space for others (not interrupting, being welcoming, having a non-judgmental presence, allowing silence that calls others to speak)
- Speak with intention (provide clarity, don't ramble, speak from the heart, don't just list facts)
- Listen actively, not only to details but also to feelings

Levels of Listening

The levels of listening in the table below generate a "field" of connection and communication.

The following table contains the four levels of listening from Otto Scharmer’s work on *Theory U*³ with an additional level of “contemplative listening” added for faith reflection by Discerning Leadership.

Level of Listening	Listening Perspective	Awareness
1 - DOWNLOADING	Listen From Habit	Reconfirming what we already know
2 - FACTUAL Open Mind	Listen From Outside	Noticing disconfirming information
3 - EMPATHETIC Open Heart	Listen From Within	Seeing through the eyes of another
4 - CONTEMPLATIVE Open Will	Listen From Spirit	Discerning inner movements and invitations
5 - GENERATIVE	Listen and Respond from the Whole	Holding space for something new to be born; seeing potential

Large Group Silent Reflection - 5 Minutes

We will take three minutes of silent reflection to contemplate the questions:

- What is the narrative of my call to purpose, service, and responsibility?
- How do I currently find God present in my vocation?

Breakout Exercise of Deep Listening - 30 Minutes

In smaller breakout groups, we will engage in the following exercise:

1. Choose one person from among the breakout group members to be the Timekeeper (give each person six minutes with a soft 1-minute signal).
2. Begin with about 30 seconds of silence and deep breathing.
3. Each person shares the story of their vocation – what prompted them to respond to their baptismal call to service.
4. After everyone has shared their story, each person takes one or two minutes to respond by saying something similar to: “As I heard others share, what resonated with me about what they said was...(words, images, emotions)...”
5. Close with about 30 seconds of silence and a Glory Be.

³The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications, Scharmer, Otto, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2018

Report Outs - 10 Minutes

A representative of each breakout group will share a few salient points from their discussion.

1. What did you notice and appreciate about the breakout group conversation?
2. What about the conditions set for the breakout group stood out to you?
3. What value is there in reconnecting with your vocational story?

Concluding Commitments – 5 Minutes

Today, we considered how Jesus listened to the blind man. Consider how you can listen more actively in the forthcoming weeks. What is one situation where you can practice listening to others more profoundly or actively between now and the next session?

Closing Prayer - 5 Minutes

Does anyone have a prayer request, perhaps for someone you know struggling or celebrating a blessing?

Looking to the Next Session - 5 Minutes

Session Three: Communal Discernment & Participatory Decision-Making

Read the following homily by Pope Francis:

[Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis](#) - Encounter, Listen, Discern



Practice using what you learned today between now and the next session.

- Be aware of your listening experience in various aspects of your life. Consider when you are listening at one of the five levels we discussed today (downloading, factual, empathetic, contemplative, and generative).
- Make a note of any generative listening you experienced.
- Write down some of your experiences to share in the next session.

Additional Resources

[Otto Scharmer](#) - A website with additional resources on *Theory U* and author and researcher Otto Scharmer



[Synodality – Revolution in Listening](#)



Session 3 – Communal Discernment & Participatory Decision-Making

Theme

Communal Discernment & Participatory Decision-Making

Preparation

Please read the following homily of Pope Francis before Session 3:

[Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis](#) - Encounter, Listen, Discern



Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Have opportunities to use the skills of synodality: Encounter, Listening, Discernment, Participation, and Accountability
- Consider how decision-making can be an inclusive process involving many people, even when the final decision is the responsibility of one or a few people
- Reflect on the participative decision-making in the early Church
- Experience the contemplative dialogue or spiritual conversation process in which a community invokes the Holy Spirit to guide their collective thoughts, feelings, and actions
- Consider how communal discernment and participative decision-making are essential to synodal leadership

Outline – 120 Minutes

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| • Overview | 5 Minutes |
| • Revisit the Prior Session | 15 Minutes |
| • Scripture Reflection | 25 Minutes |
| • Presentation | 15 Minutes |
| • Personal Reflection | 5 Minutes |
| • Breakout Group Discussion | 25 Minutes |
| • Report Outs | 5 Minutes |
| • Concluding Commitments | 10 Minutes |
| • Closing Prayer | 10 Minutes |
| • Looking to the Next Session | 5 Minutes |

Session 3 Content

Overview - 5 Minutes

- Welcome
- Review the objectives and agenda for the session

Revisit the Prior Session – 15 Minutes

In groups of three or four people, discuss the following questions:

- Did you practice using what you learned in the last session?
- Did you experience a greater awareness of how you listen in various aspects of your life or consider Otto Scharmer’s four levels of listening (downloading, factual, empathetic, and generative) and Discerning Leadership’s fifth level (contemplative) added as a faith dimension.
- Why is active listening so crucial for leadership in the Church?

Scripture Reflection - 25 Minutes

As the scripture passage is proclaimed, listen for how the first Christians are beginning to practice what we now call synodality.

- **Encounter** - Open to solidarity with people who are different from you
- **Listening** - Seeking to understand one another’s perspective
- **Discernment** - Making space for the Holy Spirit

Council of Jerusalem: Acts 15:1-21

Some who had come down from Judea were instructing the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved.” Because there arose no little dissension and debate by Paul and Barnabas with them, it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and presbyters about this question. They were sent on their journey by the church, and passed through Phoenicia and Samaria telling of the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, as well as by the apostles and the presbyters, and they reported what God had done with them. But some from the party of the Pharisees who had become believers stood up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and direct them to observe the Mosaic law.”

The apostles and the presbyters met together to see about this matter. After much debate had taken place, Peter got up and said to them, “My brothers, you are well aware that from early days God made his choice among you that through my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness by granting them the Holy Spirit just as he did us. He made no distinction between us and them, for by faith he purified their hearts. Why, then, are you now putting God to

the test by placing on the shoulders of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they.” The whole assembly fell silent, and they listened while Paul and Barnabas described the signs and wonders God had worked among the Gentiles through them.

After they had fallen silent, James responded, “My brothers, listen to me. Symeon has described how God first concerned himself with acquiring from among the Gentiles a people for his name. The words of the prophets agree with this, as is written:

‘After this I shall return
and rebuild the fallen hut of David;
from its ruins I shall rebuild it
and raise it up again,
so that the rest of humanity may seek out the Lord,
even all the Gentiles on whom my name is invoked.
Thus says the Lord who accomplishes these things,
known from of old.’

It is my judgment, therefore, that we ought to stop troubling the Gentiles who turn to God, but tell them by letter to avoid pollution from idols, unlawful marriage, the meat of strangled animals, and blood. For Moses, for generations now, has had those who proclaim him in every town, as he has been read in the synagogues every sabbath.”

Breakout Group Discussions

For 15 minutes, discuss these questions in your breakout groups:

- How were the community members in the passage including the Holy Spirit in their discussions?
- Was there time for silent discernment?
- How were people encountering one another?
- How were they listening to one another to understand differing perspectives?

Report Outs

What were some of the insights from your breakout group on the discussion questions?

Presentation – 15 Minutes

A Tool for Discernment - Spiritual Conversations

A Spiritual Conversation:

- Meaningful conversation rooted in active listening
- Relaxed grip on certainty; attention to possibilities
- Paying attention to deep meaning

- Inviting the Holy Spirit to lead
- Transformative conversation

Participation in Spiritual Conversations

- Be brief... share what matters most
- Each person shares once before anyone speaks a second time
- Share the time so everyone can speak
- Speak slowly and intentionally
- Allow pauses; silence is okay
- Look at the person speaking
- Listen without preparing a response
- Seek to build on other people's contributions and not debate
- There is no need to convince anyone of anything – only to deepen our understanding

Individual Responsibility for Group Reflection

- Ask the Spirit to guide your thoughts
- What word or phrase touched me?
- What energized me?
- Where do I feel resistance?
- What two important things do I want to remember when I go home?

Collective Discernment

As a group, we listen for how our individual contributions are beginning to create a shared understanding:

- What are we saying, collectively? What do we think?
- Where do we note the Holy Spirit leading or calling us?
- What new possibility is emerging?
- What essential points are emerging?
- What needs to be shared with the whole group, for the good of the whole?

Personal Reflection - 5 Minutes

Take five minutes of quiet reflection with these questions:

- In my ministry or life, I can leave room for the Holy Spirit by...
- In my ministry or life, I can encounter people of different perspectives by...
- In my ministry or life, I can better understand people with different perspectives by...

Please be prepared to share your responses in your breakout group.

Breakout Group Discussion - 25 Minutes

Part I - 10 minutes

Please briefly share your personal reflection responses in your breakout group.

Part II - 15 minutes

Now, look for common aspects of one another's insights. What were common elements from among each person's insights on:

- Leaving room for the Holy Spirit at meetings and other activities
- Encountering people of different perspectives in my ministry/life
- Understanding people with different perspectives

Consider how these could become ground rules for you in your ministry or other relationships in your life.

Report Outs – 5 Minutes

Share one insight or highlight from your breakout group.

Concluding Commitments - 10 Minutes

Let us consider how the early Christians discerned the Spirit. What is one way you will invite the Holy Spirit to guide the decisions you will make with others in the next two weeks? How will you invite the Holy Spirit to guide your collective decisions in the next two weeks? All participants are encouraged to make a commitment.

Closing Prayer – 10 Minutes

Does anyone have a prayer request or prayer intentions to offer?

Looking to the Next Session - 5 Minutes

Session Four – Paths to Transformation: Overcoming Biases and Assumptions

Before the next session, read the following 4-page document on Spiritual Conversation: [The Spiritual Conversation](#) - Vatican Secretariat for the Synod



As you consider the question below, write down some notes to share in the next session: Can you think of ways to introduce the method of spiritual conversations into your life or ministry?

Session 4 – Paths to Transformation: Overcoming Biases and Assumptions

Theme

Paths to Transformation: Observing Biases and Assumptions

Preparation

Please read the following four-page document on Spiritual Conversation before Session 4: [The Spiritual Conversation](#) - Vatican Secretariat for the Synod.



Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Invite the Holy Spirit to guide our conversations
- Get to know one another more fully
- Listen openly to one another's values
- Connect personal values to a shared mission
- Examine assumptions and biases and practice a technique for recognizing them
- Understand how unconscious assumptions and biases can inhibit our transformation
- Commit to practicing synodality in daily life

Outline - 120 Minutes

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| • Overview | 5 Minutes |
| • Revisit the Prior Session | 15 Minutes |
| • Scripture Reflection | 15 Minutes |
| • Breakout in Pairs for Discussion | 15 Minutes |
| • Presentation | 20 Minutes |
| • Breakout Group Exercise | 20 Minutes |
| • Report Outs | 10 Minutes |
| • Closing Commitments | 10 Minutes |
| • Closing Prayer | 5 Minutes |
| • Looking to the Next Session | 5 Minutes |

Session 4 Content

Overview – 5 Minutes

- Welcome
- Review the objectives and agenda for the session

Revisit the Prior Session – 15 Minutes

In your breakout groups, have a conversation using the following questions:

1. Were there any ways you introduced the method of spiritual conversations into your ministry or other aspects of your life?
2. Were there any new insights you had from reading the article?

Scripture Reflection – 15 Minutes

Put Away Sin and Put on Virtue: Colossians 3:8-14

But now you must put them all away: anger, fury, malice, slander, and obscene language out of your mouths. Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.

Breakout Group Reflection Question

Take about 12 minutes in your breakout group to discuss the following question:

Saint Paul addressed his letter to the congregation at Colossae in response to spreading false teachings in the community. Paul insists that false teachings are “shadows;” Christ is “reality.” Paul talks about vices to “put away” and virtues to “put on” as if they were garments. **If we use the same analogy for synodality, what would we put aside, and what would we put on?**

Breakout in Pairs for Discussion - 15 Minutes

Individual Reflection: My Values and Virtues

Knowing our values helps us to be more firmly rooted and joyful, even amid turmoil. During this session, we will discuss the importance of not being enclosed in our convictions, assumptions, and biases. Being open to other perspectives requires humility and vulnerability. Embracing a clear set of values strengthens us for the humility and vulnerability that synodality requires. Being open to other people’s perspectives does not mean forgetting your values.

Take 5 minutes of individual, quiet reflection and read the values below. From the list or drawing on any other values that are significant to you, choose three that are most important.

Achievement	Adventure	Autonomy	Belonging
Patriotism	Community	Competency	Creative
Curiosity	Determination	Fairness	Charity
Faith	Fortitude	Friendships	Honesty
Hope	Humility	Integrity	Joy
Justice	Kindness	Loyalty	Peace
Pleasure	Prudence	Power	Recognition
Respect	Status	Temperance	Wisdom

Discussion in Pairs

Tell your partner your three values. Choose one and describe why this value is essential to you. (About 5 minutes each person)

Presentation – 20 Minutes

Pope Francis Explains Synodality⁴

In his address to the Roman Curia in December 2021, Pope Francis said:

During the opening of the synodal assembly, I used three key words: participation, communion and mission. These arise from a humble heart: without humility there can be neither participation, nor communion, nor mission. Those words are the three requirements that I would like to indicate as a style of humility at which we here in the Curia should aim. Three ways to make the path of humility a concrete path to follow in practice.

First, participation. This ought to be expressed through a style of co-responsibility. Certainly, in the diversity of our roles and ministries, responsibilities will differ, yet it is important that everyone feel involved, co-responsible for the work, without having the depersonalizing experience of implementing a programme devised by someone else. ... Authority becomes service when it shares, involves and helps people to grow.

The second word is communion. This does not have to do with majorities or minorities; essentially, it is based on our relationship with Christ. We will never have an evangelical style in our respective settings unless we put Christ back in the centre, not this or that party opinion: Christ at the centre. Many of us work together, but what builds communion is also the ability to pray together, to listen together to God's word and to construct relationships that go beyond work and strengthen beneficial relations between us by helping one another. Otherwise, we risk being nothing more than strangers working in the

⁴Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To The Roman Curia, Benediction Hall, 23 December 2021

same place, competitors looking to advance or, worse yet, forging relationships based on personal interests, forgetting the common cause that holds us together.

The third word is mission. This is what saves us from falling back on ourselves. Those who are turned in on themselves, “look from above and from afar, they reject the prophecy of their brothers and sisters, they discredit those who raise questions, they constantly point out the mistakes of others and they are obsessed by appearances. Their hearts are open only to the limited horizon of their own immanence and interests, and as a consequence they neither learn from their sins nor are they genuinely open to forgiveness. These are the two signs of “closed” persons: they do not learn from their sins and they are not open to forgiveness. This is a tremendous corruption disguised as a good. We need to avoid it by making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor,” (Evangeliium Gaudium, 97). Only a heart open to mission can ensure that everything we do, ad intra and ad extra, is marked by the regenerating power of the Lord’s call.

A Tool for Openness to Others

As Pope Francis points out, we cannot be open to one another if we are enclosed in our convictions. Synodality requires a posture of vulnerability and openness rather than “enclosed in our convictions.”

We must effectively discern our biases and assumptions by being reflective and curious. The following is the typical thinking pattern for a non-reflective person:

- *My beliefs are the truth.*
- *The truth is obvious.*
- *My beliefs are objective.*

We all have biases. We must be aware of our biases and assumptions so they do not control us, and begin to think more creatively and collaboratively. Here is a way we can be attentive to the assumptions and biases we are forming:

- I am called to acknowledge that I have biases. Then, I educate myself about the people, culture, or organizations I hold biases about.
- I am called to let other people challenge my assumptions.
- I am called to be open to feedback.
- I am called to embrace diverse perspectives. To be curious and seek information from various sources.

Ladder of Inference

Harvard Professor and organizational psychologist Chris Argyris proposed a model popularized by Peter Senge in [*The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*](#) called “The Ladder of Inference.” It describes the thinking process we go through, usually without realizing it, to get from a fact to a decision



or action. Without reflective thought, we leap from facts to action, flawed by our assumptions and biases.

[The Ladder of Inference - Year 10 CS Ambassadors](#) (1:48)



- 5 - **I take action.**
I act based on my conclusions.
- 4 - **I conclude.**
My assumptions and interpretation of the facts form my conclusions.
- 3 - **I add interpretations.**
With the selected facts, I make assumptions based on prior beliefs (possibly biases) and the meaning I give to my observations.
- 2 - **I select some information (facts).**
We select data and facts based on convictions and prior experiences. Our frame of reference plays a role in this.
- 1 - **Reality and Facts**
Facts are what a video camera would record of a situation.

So why is this critical? It is critical for us to filter information, otherwise, we would be immobilized in data-overload. The problem is that we are typically unaware of how we select information, add meaning, make conclusions, and act upon our assumptions. If we are more aware of when we are operating from assumptions, there would be so much less resentment, misunderstanding, and inefficiencies in our family, ministry, community, and work. We are human, and so we will never think and act perfectly in this life. Awareness is the key to a healthier life and relationships.

Breakout Group Exercise – 20 Minutes

Individually, take five minutes and jot down some responses to the following questions:

1. When did you make an assumption or hold a bias and later realize it was inaccurate?
2. How can you encourage others to help you question your assumptions?
3. How could you use the Ladder of Inference to help you remain open to other people's perspectives?

In your breakout groups, take 15 minutes to discuss a summary of your answers to the questions above.

Report Outs – 10 Minutes

- What were a few salient points from each breakout group?

- What are examples of how it could benefit our ministries if we helped people be more aware of the Ladder of Inference?

Closing Commitments – 10 Minutes

- What is your key takeaway from today?
- What commitment do you want to make regarding openness and biases for the next two weeks? (Each person answers in the large group.)

Closing Prayer - 5 Minutes

Does anyone have a prayer request, perhaps for someone you know who is struggling or celebrating a blessing?

Looking to the Next Session - 5 Minutes

Session 5 – A Framework for Leading Change: Adaptive Leadership

Please read the following 8-page article before Session 5:

[Becoming An Adaptive Leader - Lifelong Faith](#)

We will also discuss your insights on awareness of biases and openness to other perspectives.



Sources

[Are You Aware of Your Biases?](#) Carmen Acton, Harvard Business Review, February 04, 2022.



[The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization](#), Peter M. Senge, Doubleday, March 21, 2006.



[Knowledge for Action: A Guide to Overcoming Barriers to Organizational Change](#), Chris Argyris, Jossey-Bass, 1993.



Session 5 – A Framework for Leading Change: Adaptive Leadership

Theme

A Framework for Leading Change: Adaptive Leadership

Note to Facilitator: In the presentation on Adaptive Leadership, highlight *three* of the *seven* skills that are relevant for the group. Introduce the other four, but focus on the three you chose.

Preparation

Please read the following 8-page article before Session 5: [Becoming An Adaptive Leader - Lifelong Faith](#)

We will also discuss your insights on awareness of biases and openness to other perspectives.



Learning Objectives

- Invite the Holy Spirit to guide our conversations
- Become aware of new ways of identifying and handling challenges
- Reflect on how complex problems require deeper diagnosis and new approaches
- Draw from their leadership and resources and learn from one another's lived experience
- Consider new attitudes and mindsets essential to a new way of leading
- Learn specific practices that enhance their adaptive capacity
- Commit to practicing synodality in daily life.

Outline - 120 Minutes (150 minutes with optional additions)

- Overview 5 Minutes
- Opening Prayer 5 Minutes
- Revisit the Prior Session 15 Minutes
- Presentation: Leadership Challenges 20 Minutes
- Personal and Breakout Group Reflection 15 Minutes
- Presentation: Adaptive Leadership 20 Minutes
- Adaptive Leadership Examples 10 Minutes
- Personal and Breakout Group Reflection 15 Minutes
- Concluding Commitments 5 Minutes
- Closing Prayer 5 Minutes
- Looking to the Final Session 5 Minutes
- *Optional* Case Study of Adaptive Leadership 15 Minutes
- *Optional* Insights and Applications 15 Minutes

Session 5 Content

Overview - 5 Minutes

- Welcome, Learning Objectives, and Agenda
- Review the objectives and agenda for the session

Opening Prayer - 5 Minutes

Prayer for a Synodal Church

Three volunteers from among the participants read:

Person #1: Here we are, Lord. Holy Spirit, teach us what and how to speak and when to keep quiet. Help us to be a synodal Church, capable of discovering and transmitting the mystery of walking together, finding each other, and supporting each other.

Person #2: Teach us to leave ourselves to join others and do good. May this group meeting be a healing and hopeful path. Spirit of God, who invites us to the risk of meeting others in an appropriate attitude: make us a synodal Church, in which we experience a home and a school of communion.

Person #3: Help us move the Church to go out of itself in mission, to taste the pure air of the Spirit that frees us from being focused on ourselves and invites us to seek out those who are indifferent, and those who don't believe.

As a group:

- Think of a word, phrase, or sentence from the prayer that is special to you?
- For two minutes, close your eyes and silently repeat the words that were special to you several times.
- At the end of the two minutes, you will be asked to open your eyes and pray the end of the prayer, together.

All: Bring us the Holy Spirit of God, keep us in unity, being aware that we are in the same boat and going towards the same port. Lead us to be Church in the street, full of life and peace, in the communion of solidarity and missionary fruitfulness. Allow us to meet again to listen to each other, dialogue, and make decisions.

Revisit the Prior Session - 15 Minutes

In a breakout group, discuss the following question: Were there any ways you observed how the Ladder of Inference showed that different people can have alternative versions of the "truth?"

Presentation - 20 Minutes

Leadership Challenges

What is a VUCA environment?

- **Volatile** - The environment demands you react quickly to ongoing changes that are unpredictable and out of your control
- **Uncertain** - The environment requires you to take action without certainty
- **Complex** - The environment is dynamic, with many interdependencies
- **Ambiguous** - The environment is unfamiliar, outside of your expertise.

Are there any examples of how your organization has experienced an increase in VUCA – a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment?

Technical Problems vs. Adaptive Challenges

According to Professor Ronald Heifetz of Harvard University, leaders' biggest shortcoming is treating adaptive challenges as technical problems and looking for easy solutions. Technical challenges are those that experts can solve, whereas adaptive challenges are volatile, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous. In addressing adaptive challenges, leaders must think systemically to understand the myriad stakeholders and contributing factors. The leader requires skills to lead changes in values, beliefs, roles, and relationships and adopt an experimental mindset.⁵

Personal and Breakout Group Reflection - 15 Minutes

Take 2 minutes of quiet time and consider the main challenges you currently face in your life. Those challenges could be positive (a goal you are striving to achieve) or negative (a threat you want to turn into an opportunity). Write a list of two or three.

- Which one seems the most complicated?
- What makes it complicated?
- What do complicated challenges have in common?

For ten minutes, share the most complex challenge with the members of your breakout group. The intention is to find commonality among our challenges, *and not to solve one another's challenges or offer advice.*

Report Outs

Share a salient point from each breakout group about things challenges have in common.

⁵ Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading, Linsky and Heifetz, Harvard Business Review Press, 2002

Presentation - 20 Minutes

Adaptive Leadership

The Seven Adaptive Skills Are:

1. Get on the balcony, Distinguish Subject from Object: Maintain perspective by observing the system above the action.
2. Think politically: What are each stakeholder's values, loyalties, risks of loss, and hidden alliances?
3. Orchestrate the conflict: Create a "holding environment" where people can tackle tough questions honestly.
4. Discipline attention to the real issues: Don't be distracted by the noise and confusion.
5. Give the work back: Avoid trying to handle everything and resist giving people the answer.
6. Regulate disequilibrium: Increase or lower the heat/pressure/motivation.
7. Infuse the work with meaning: Focus on *why*, not just *how*. Connect tactics to the mission.

Adaptive Leadership Examples - 10 Minutes

- Don't attempt to lead on your own. Move toward a more distributive leadership with teams working collaboratively.
- Focus on followers' beliefs, needs, and values to get people to want to change and lead change.
- Conduct a "listening tour" of people in your organization to know what motivates them. People want to be seen, heard, and understood.
- Remind people of the mission and vision (what and why) when they are distracted by "noise."
- Always put a human face on what you and your team do and the contribution you make.
- Share success stories to communicate to everyone their role and importance in achieving mission success.
- Explore differences and creatively solve problems through collaboration. Defining the problem and finding a solution require collaboration and co-creation.
- Practice listening, being open-minded, dialogue, and discernment.
- Ask reflective questions (e.g., What are the three biggest challenges we face that may undermine mission success? What are two things we could change to make us more effective?).
- Create small and diverse groups for dialogue and collaboration to identify problems and create solutions.

Personal and Breakout Reflection - 15 Minutes

In breakout groups, we will discuss the following questions:

1. What is one example of how you are leading adaptively?
2. How could you apply one of these practices to your most complicated challenge?

Concluding Commitments - 5 Minutes

What commitment do you want to make to practice adaptive leadership for the next two weeks?
(Each person answers both questions in the large group.)

Closing Prayer - 5 Minutes

Does anyone have a prayer request, perhaps for someone you know who is struggling or celebrating a blessing?

Looking to the Final Session - 5 Minutes

Session 6: Building Bridges in the Church

At the beginning of the final session, you will be asked: How have you experimented with using one of the seven practices of Adaptive Leadership?

View the following three-minute video from Pittsburgh University before Session 6: [Cultural Humility](#)



Please read this short document from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) *Cultural Diversity In The Church, Intercultural Competencies* Module 2: [Intercultural Competencies Module 2 | USCCB](#)



Sources

[The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World](#), Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, Harvard Business Press, 2009.



[A Survival Guide for Leaders](#), Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, Harvard Business Review, June 2002.



Optional Case Study of Adaptive Leadership - 15 Minutes

Stefanie was a competent, well-respected, and admired Holy Wisdom Catholic School principal. She was professional yet empathetic in her approach to work. Stephanie cared for the faculty and staff with tremendous respect and gratitude. She also had high expectations and did not accept inferior performance.

Stefanie resigned, and school employees were saddened by her exit. The replacement principal (David) came soon after. Faculty and staff were apprehensive about the new principal's capabilities; they thought he could never fill Stefanie's shoes.

David took an adaptive approach, knowing he had big shoes to fill. He could have led from the position of authority but chose to be inclusive in making decisions. He sought the employees' feedback and ideas to ensure they felt valued and respected, just like Stefanie made them feel.

David was not appreciated by some parents, who wanted him to respond quickly and decisively with an easy solution to a drop in some standardized test scores. Instead, he assembled an ad hoc committee of teachers and parents to investigate the contributing factors. One action he took quickly was to heighten the teachers' awareness of the long-term detrimental effects of bullying when he observed an attitude of "they're just kids being kids" among the faculty.

Even his administrative team members didn't expect him to be so inclusive and adaptive from the onset. In a couple of months, the results of his adaptive leadership approach were evident. David continued to take fresh ideas seriously from the employees. He didn't need to prove he was a competent boss. David asked many questions and encouraged everyone to be attentive to emerging trends in education. When a personnel problem arose, he rejected quick judgments about a person's competency and motive and considered it systemically.

It didn't take long for his faculty to trust and respect him for fostering collaboration and continued development. He successfully navigated the school through ups and downs and enjoyed success throughout his tenure.

Insights and Application - 15 Minutes

In the large group, we will discuss the following questions:

1. What elements of adaptive leadership do you observe in David's actions?
2. What is one example of how you are leading adaptively?

Session 6 – Building Bridges in the Church

Theme

Building Bridges in the Church

Note to Facilitator

Be aware of who is in your group and consider how building a bridge to alternative perspectives will differ based on who is taking part. For example, biases might stem from other differences besides cultural, ethnic, and racial (for example: geographic location such as urban v. rural, economic status, education level, and occupation, can all influence perspective).

Preparation

View the following three-minute video from Pittsburgh University before Session 6: [Cultural Humility](#)



Please read this short document from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) *Cultural Diversity In The Church, Intercultural Competencies* Module 2: [Intercultural Competencies Module 2 | USCCB](#)



Learning Objectives

- Celebrate the rich contributions of our different perspectives
- Understand the implications of diversity and cultural differences
- Realize how much cultural backgrounds influence perspectives
- Assess their cultural awareness and assumptions
- Look for opportunities to build relationships across cultural frontiers in their pastoral leadership
- Be able to use a tool for cultural sensitivity.

Session Outline - 120 Minutes

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| • Overview | 5 Minutes |
| • Revisit the Prior Session | 10 Minutes |
| • Breakout Theme Conversation | 15 Minutes |
| • Scripture Reflection | 20 Minutes |
| • Presentation | 20 Minutes |
| • Exercise: A Graced Conversation | 20 Minutes |
| • Report Outs | 5 Minutes |
| • Concluding Commitments | 15 Minutes |
| • Final Session Conclusion | 10 Minutes |

Session 6 Content

Overview – 5 Minutes

- Welcome
- Review the schedule for the session

Revisit the Prior Session - 10 Minutes

Tell us how you experimented with using one of the seven practices of Adaptive Leadership:

1. Get on the balcony, Distinguish Subject from Object
2. Think politically
3. Orchestrate the conflict
4. Discipline attention to the real issues
5. Give the work back
6. Regulate disequilibrium
7. Infuse the work with meaning.

Breakout Theme Conversation – 15 Minutes

Think of when you crossed a cultural barrier. It could be in a parish, work, school, neighborhood, family, or social setting. **In your breakout group, start with one minute of silence and consider the following questions.** After the silence, take turns describing your experience (about three minutes each).

1. How did you feel before, during, and after the experience?
2. What graces did you experience?
3. What challenges did you experience?

Scripture Reflection - 20 Minutes

The Syrophenician Woman's Faith: Mark 7:24-29

From that place he went off to the district of Tyre. He entered a house and wanted no one to know about it, but he could not escape notice. Soon a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him. She came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth, and she begged him to drive the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first. For it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." She replied and said to him, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's scraps." Then he said to her, "For saying this, you may go. The demon has gone out of your daughter."

Large Group Reflection Question

What are the cultural barriers that Jesus is crossing in this encounter?

Breakout Discussion Questions

1. When Jesus tested her faith, how did the Syrophenician woman react?
2. What does this passage teach about Jesus' mission?
3. What does this teach us about how the Church is intended to be?



Presentation – 20 Minutes

Source: [Intercultural Competencies Module 2 | USCCB](#)

What Is Culture?

1. *Cultures have ideas and ways of expressing them.* Cultures have beliefs about God, themselves, and others. Cultures carry values that shape their ways of living and interacting with others. Cultures have a language that conveys their ideas, feelings, and ways of living.
2. *Cultures have behaviors.* Cultures have rules about what is proper and improper behavior. Roles—for example, within the family—have distinctive features. Cultures have ways of celebrating and extending hospitality.
3. *Cultures have material dimensions.* Cultures have material, outward signs that express and reflect their ideas and beliefs. Cultures have special foods (what is eaten every day and on special occasions). Among other things, cultures also have unique modes of dressing and furnishing their homes.

What is Cultural Humility?

According to diversity expert Michael Wheeler, *Cultural humility* means entering a relationship with another person with the intention of honoring their beliefs, customs, and values. It is an ongoing process of self-exploration, self-critique, and willingness to learn from others.⁶



Key attributes of cultural humility:

- openness
- self-reflection and awareness
- lifelong learning
- institutional accountability
- empathy and compassion
- to be “other-oriented”
- acknowledging power imbalances and balancing power imbalances

What Is Intercultural Competence?

Intercultural competence is communicating, relating, and working across cultural boundaries. It involves developing capacity in *knowledge*, *skills*, and *attitudes*. If you are a member of a culture other than the prevailing one, you have already learned a considerable amount about

⁶ Wheeler, Michael. “[Cultural Competence and Cultural Humility: A Literature Review for Understanding and Action](#)”

intercultural communication because you have had to survive in the prevailing culture. To gain intercultural competence, prevailing-culture people may have to learn to think in cultural categories before they can exercise greater competency in moving across cultures.

Knowledge involves the following:

- Knowledge of more than one perspective on things
- Knowledge of different interpretations of the same cultural reality
- Knowledge of general dynamics of intercultural communication
- Knowledge of more than one's first language

Skills entail the following:

- Ability to empathize
- Ability to tolerate ambiguity
- Ability to adapt communication and behavior

Attitudes include the following:

- Openness to others and other cultures
- Wanting to learn and engage different cultures
- Understanding intercultural interaction as a way of life, not a problem to be solved
- Mindfulness

Additional Reading:

Guevarra, Mark (2021) "[Toward a Synodal Parish: Practical Methods for Fostering Synodality](#)," New Horizons: Vol. 5 : Iss. 2, Article 10.



Exercise: A Graced Conversation – 20 Minutes

Take five minutes of individual reflection and 15 minutes in breakout groups.

For your individual reflection, consider someone with a different perspective than you do (faith, race, culture, gender, politics, etc.). Imagine having a conversation to get to know the person better and to find points of encounter and commonality.

Consider your answers to the following questions for discussion in your breakout group.

1. What can I learn from this person? As a child of God, he or she is my sister or brother, not a challenge to overcome but rather a collaborator in the search for common ground.
2. What am I hoping for in this dialogue? What questions can I ask that will help me understand their beliefs, customs, values, and perspectives better?
3. What can I bring to the conversation? How might my values help me be open to finding common ground and commitments?

Report Outs – 5 Minutes

Share a salient point from each breakout group that considers the ways this type of reflection could help diverse communities walk together in the Church.

Concluding Commitments - 15 Minutes

Commitments for Session Six:

What is one way you can practice cultural humility in your life situation?

Commitments for Continuing the Journey:

Thinking about what's next in your synodal journey, is there a specific topic you want to pursue further? This could be an individual commitment, or a commitment that group members could make to continue the journey together?

- Deep Listening
- Spiritual Conversations
- Overcoming Biases
- Inclusive Decision-making
- Adaptive Leadership
- Intercultural Bridges

Consider these questions:

1. What will I do differently as a result of the experience of synodal leadership?
2. Are there any policies, procedures, or structures that could change to accommodate greater synodality?
3. How can I communicate synodal leadership methods to the people I work with?
4. What results do I expect to occur from increased synodality in my life or ministry?

Final Session Conclusion – 10 Minutes

As we come to the end of our course, take some time to reflect on your experience. **Please share your evaluation of the sessions (content and facilitation) and the overall experience of the course.**

Additional Resources

All scripture references in this document are from the [New American Bible \(Revised Edition\)](#). (2010). BibleGateway.com.



The Vatican provides a repository of synodal documents, communications tools, and spiritual and liturgical resources at: <https://www.synod.va/en/resources.html>



The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have a website with resources on the synodal process: <https://www.usccb.org/synod>



[Core Concepts for Leadership Formation for a Synodal Church](#), Michael Brough, Leadership Roundtable, 2023.



[The Listening Parish: A Guidebook to Synodality Practices in a Faith Community](#), Michael L. Papesh, The Pastoral Center, 2023.



[Synodality: A New Way of Proceeding in the Church](#), Rafael Luciani, Paulist Press, 2022.



[“Towards A Spirituality For Synodality.”](#) Vatican, Accessed: April 19, 2024.



[Walking Together: The Way of Synodality](#), Pope Francis, Orbis, 2023.



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[Catholic Leadership Institute](#)
[Discerning Leadership](#)
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