

Participant Ground Rules & Small Group Process

Keys to Communicating and Listening Effectively

P – PRAY and PONDER before and after you speak. Ask our Lord to be in your heart and mind and on your lips as you begin to speak. Also, ponder what has been shared and what the Lord is putting on your heart.

R – Take RESPONSIBILITY for your own thoughts and feelings, avoiding the temptation to lay blame on others. Likewise, keep in mind that you are not responsible for the thoughts and feelings of others in your group. In a context of listening and sharing, it is okay for varying thoughts and feelings to be shared.

A – ALLOW others to speak and to share without correction or criticism. If you are more outgoing and assertive in conversation, it may be helpful to listen more and to allow those who typically do not speak to be heard first. We hope to hear from everyone during this synodal process, especially those on the margins.

Y – YOU – Be attentive to your own thoughts, feelings, opinions or even prejudices. Ask yourself, “Why do I feel or think this way?”

E – Use EMPATHETIC listening, and be attentive not just to words but also to feelings being expressed. Try placing yourself in the speaker’s situation to help yourself truly feel what he or she is feeling.

R – RESPECT every person as Jesus taught us: *love one another*. Avoid minimizing or dismissing other people’s thoughts or experiences. Always seek to control your emotions while speaking and listening, showing kindness and generosity towards others.

The prayer-centered listening sessions are ultimately opportunities to listen and share, primarily in small-group format. The goal is not to discuss or debate, but rather to pray and to allow an opportunity for all to listen and share. A method of invitation is a way to include all people in the conversation in a very respectful atmosphere. While each person is speaking, the others listen. No one may interrupt the speaker or jump in to speak without being invited/prompted by the facilitator. In cases where there is one facilitator for a number of small groups, as is envisioned for many of the sessions outlined above, participants can go in order around the table to share, choosing to pass if they would rather not share at a particular moment. In cases where a volunteer table moderator is present, that person can assist to ensure that each person in the small group has an opportunity to share.