



## No One is Excluded: Raising Up Every Person's Voice

**Every voice matters.** This is the most important thing the Church can communicate to *everyone*. The invitation to contribute to the current consultation process is purposeful in its broad inclusivity.

The Synod [Preparatory Document](#) notes that one of the key objectives of the synodal journey is “living a participative and inclusive ecclesial process that offers everyone—especially those who for various reasons find themselves on the margins—the opportunity to express themselves and to be heard in order to contribute to the edification of the People of God” (2). No one should feel or be excluded from the walking the synodal path. There must always be a doorway for every member of the Body of Christ in the world to walk through and feel they are part of this global consultation.

Again, recognizing that each voice is unique, it will also be important to approach various populations and communities in ways that are distinct and relevant to them. While it may be easy to host a listening session in a parish or other local setting on one or two evenings, that method may not work for all. For instance, when speaking about youth and young adults, Pope Francis commented, “In addition to the ordinary, well-planned pastoral ministry that parishes and movements carry out, it is also important to allow room for a ‘popular’...ministry, with a different style, schedule, pace, and method. Broader and more flexible, it goes out to those places where real young people are active” ([Christus Vivit](#) 230).

Going out where various populations are active is excellent advice for any community that would not normally attend or participate in a consultation held at a church or ecclesial institutions. In an increasingly secular landscape, this insight (of *going out*) applies not only to youth or young adults, but almost all ages, cultures, and demographics.

On the occasions when a Catholic community hosts a listening session, conversation, or consultation in their ecclesial or ministerial setting, a pastoral leader should ask themselves:

- **Who was missing from that consultation? Who did not receive an invitation?**
- **What groups or communities had less representation than anticipated?**
- **How can their voices be part of our consultation and, by consequence, our community?**

Here is a checklist that might be helpful to gauge the inclusivity of the consultation process. It is important to regularly assess the engagement of the entire community. Knowledge of outreach can lead to more voices being heard and more opportunities for encounter and transformation. This list is not exhaustive; however, it can be a helpful tool to identify those who are often overlooked in traditional ecclesial processes.

- ✓ Children (ages pre-K to 13)
- ✓ Adolescents or youth (ages 13 to 18)
- ✓ Adult Catholics (ages 18 and above)
  - Collegians (ages 18 to 25)

- Young adults (ages 18 to 39)
- Seniors and the elderly (over age 75)
- ✓ Persons with disabilities and the deaf community
- ✓ Parents and families of children of all ages
- ✓ Grandparents and extended families
- ✓ Those who are single or single again
- ✓ Those who are dating and engaged
- ✓ Those who are recently or newly married
- ✓ Married couples without children
- ✓ Those who are discerning or studying for priesthood
- ✓ Those who are discerning or studying for consecrated life
- ✓ Those who are discerning or studying for lay ecclesial ministry
- ✓ Those who are ordained (priests and deacons)
- ✓ Those who are in consecrated life (sisters, brothers, monks, nuns, third order, etc.)
- ✓ Those who are lay ecclesial ministers (pastoral leaders, catechists, liturgical ministers, etc.)
- ✓ Those who are divorced, separated, or widowed
- ✓ The Asian and Pacific Islander cultural family
- ✓ The Black and African American cultural family
- ✓ The Hispanic and Latino cultural family
- ✓ The Native American and Indigenous cultural family
- ✓ The White and European American cultural family
- ✓ Those who are migrants, refugees, and travelers
- ✓ Recent immigrants and those in ethnic apostolates
- ✓ Both Eastern Rite and Latin Rite Catholics
- ✓ Those in military and diplomatic service, including those serving overseas
- ✓ Those who are incarcerated and in other legal situations

- ✓ Those who are homeless and those living in poverty
- ✓ Those who are persecuted, oppressed, trafficked, or marginalized
- ✓ Those who are sick, in elder care, or homebound
- ✓ Those who identify as LGBTQ+
- ✓ Those in interfaith or religiously mixed households
- ✓ Those from other Christian traditions/churches
- ✓ Those from other religions and faith traditions
- ✓ Those who identify as atheist or agnostic
- ✓ Those who are disaffiliated
- ✓ Those who do not identify with any religious practice
- ✓ Those who have been hurt or marginalized by the Church
- ✓ Those who are questioning or doubting faith
- ✓ Those who are seeking or searching for faith
- ✓ Those who visit churches at moments of return
- ✓ Collaborators in the civic or secular world

Each of these (and other) populations have a unique voice that is worth listening to, as all are children of God. Even if a community has already gone through a synodal process, or if many listening sessions were already held, it is never too late to ask the question: “who is still missing?” Bringing individuals within each of these populations to the table will only enhance the experience.

For some of these groups, it will be important to “go out” and meet them where they are active and present within the world. This is especially fitting for those who have disaffiliated or been hurt by the Church, as well as ecumenical and interfaith communities and collaborators; however, as noted above, there are people in all these groups who may need intentional outreach (i.e., because schedules, access to transportation, financial difficulties, or physical ability could prevent them from

participating at consultations at a church, institution, or other ecclesial setting).

It should also be noted that consultations do not need to take any particular form. Despite the abundance of resources on how to conduct formal listening sessions, meetings, or events to elicit feedback and responsiveness from the community, the consultation can take place in whatever manner is most appropriate for the individual to feel comfortable, trusting, and open enough to share their story.

Some suggestions for this outreach can include:

- **Encourage families to have informal conversations** with those who are within one or more of the populations listed above, i.e., a son or daughter who has disaffiliated from the Church; a relative with a physical or developmental disability; or a grandparent in elder care.
- **Work with chaplains and prison ministries** to arrange conversations with the incarcerated.
- **Ask adults in the community to visit** their elderly and homebound neighbors, as well as those individuals in hospitals, nursing homes, and long-term care facilities for conversations.
- **Invite young adults to engage in dialogue** with their peers, especially those who may be less active in the practice of their faith and those of other religious communities.
- **Arrange a dialogue** with neighboring Christian churches, inviting active members of that faith community to meet with active members of your own. The same can be done with those from neighboring temples, mosques, or houses of worship of other religious traditions.

- **Informally invite contractors and vendors** that you use (i.e., construction engineers, delivery services, food and beverage providers, etc.) to engage one-on-one or in a small group consultation around the questions in the synodal process.
- **Reach out to chaplains or Catholic pastoral leaders on military bases** in the area to engage service men and women in the local area in consultations.
- **Collaborate with local ministries** that regularly engage youth, collegians, young adults, engaged and married couples, parents and families, singles, seniors, cultural communities, and other populations to strategize conversation ideas for those particular populations.
- **Provide conversation starters to active Catholics** so they can strike up a dialogue around the synodal questions with people they interact with in their community (i.e., neighbors, at the grocery or hardware store, online with social media contacts, etc.).

These are just a few ideas, but your Synod team can brainstorm other ways to creatively go beyond the walls of the church to encourage a synodal spirit within the broader community, so that no one is excluded from the conversations that will shape the consultation phase.



Copyright © 2022, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. All rights reserved. This text may be reproduced in whole or in part without alteration for nonprofit educational use, provided such reprints are not sold and include this notice.

Quotes from *Christus Vivit*, copyright © 2019, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (LEV), Vatican City State. Used with

permission. All rights reserved. Quotes from Preparatory Document, copyright © 2021, Libreria Editrice Vaticana

(LEV), Vatican City State. Used with permission. All rights reserved.