



## Synod Participation Process - Notes for Facilitators and Scribes

### THE FACILITATOR

The facilitator has a key role in helping the group's discernment. The role of the facilitator is outlined in the Synod Participation Booklet:

“The group should have a *facilitator* whose task is to keep order, ensure listening and bring together what has been said.”

The process of group discernment is outlined in the Synod Participation Booklet. This leaflet offers hints for facilitators and a more detailed view of the group discernment process from the facilitator's perspective.

The process involves sharing and discernment. Sharing means each person gives their thoughts without interruption or comment from others. Listening is a critical part of the discernment process – listening both to others and to what God is saying to me. The process is about being present to the Holy Spirit and to one another.

### THE PROCESS

1. **Introductions:** Take time to make introductions at the beginning. It helps people to feel more comfortable with sharing with one another.
2. **Appoint a scribe:** Make sure the group has someone who can make notes for preparing a written response.
3. **Pray together:** the facilitator should decide beforehand what form the group's prayer will take. It should not be rushed, and needs to include some time for silent reflection.
4. **Explain the process:** this helps people to make decisions about their contribution.
5. **Understanding “Go you are sent”:** if this is the first time that the group has come together to reflect on the Synod topics, it is helpful for people to share what this phrase means for them. Each person should give the thought which is most significant for them about the words “Go you are sent”. After a silence, each person is asked: what has someone said that is significant for you about “Go you are sent”?
6. **Clarifying the topic:** the facilitator should make clear what topic is being dealt with, and which question.
7. **Addressing the topic:** the process for dealing with a question (below) is also set out in the Synod Participation Booklet on page 6:
  - Step 1:* Each person in turn gives their thoughts about the question. These thoughts should relate to the topic but participants are free to go beyond the question. They can share ideas, insights, experiences, new directions, dreams for the Church - this stage is a sharing process, not a discussion in which you respond to what another person has said.
  - Step 2:* The group can repeat Step 1, or it can go on to Step 3. The facilitator can ask the group if they have more they would like to share, and go round the group again. Let participants know that they can say if they don't have anything more to add.
  - Step 3:* The facilitator asks: “What has someone said that is significant for you?” A time of silence before people begin to answer will allow them to discern what their response will be. Participants can offer a phrase or sentence, or more if they wish. This step will allow the

facilitator to see where there are points of convergence in the group's discernment, and help the development of the summary.

8. **Summary:** The facilitator may ask the scribe to read back the notes, or may consult them. He/she then summarizes the ideas and insights of the group (take a few minutes before doing this). Three or four points are usually sufficient for the summary, and there may be less.
9. **Checking the summary:** Give people time to absorb what they have heard and to formulate their response. Each participant is then asked how they feel about the summary. As the members of the group respond, look for peace and enthusiasm. If all are at peace with the summary then the group's work is done. (Note: "I can live with it" is not being at peace with the summary. If you get this type of response from any participant then ask what the problem is, assess whether the summary needs to be changed and whether other members of the group are supporting a change. It is important not to let free discussion break out in this situation.)

If there seems to be disagreement about the summary from several people, the facilitator may ask the group to take time for silent prayer and reflection, and then ask them to share what they would like changed. The aim is for everyone to feel at peace with what will go forward from the group, but it may be that the group has to record the differing views and move on.

#### **10. Written response**

The facilitator should make arrangements for someone (probably the scribe or facilitator) to record their ideas and send them to the Archdiocese (see section Submitting your Response in the Synod Participation Booklet or the instructions on the flyer given out in parish newsletters). If the facilitator is not submitting the response, he/she should follow up to make sure it is done.

### **GENERAL HINTS FOR FACILITATORS**

- If someone doesn't want to contribute, don't badger them. People sometimes don't want to speak in the first round, but they should be encouraged to answer to the question "What has someone said that is significant for you?".
- If discussion breaks out and people start responding to what others have said, gently explain draw them back into a sharing mode. Sharing involves giving one's own thoughts, not responding to the sharing of others.
- In the step where they are asked "What has someone said that is significant for you?" they have the opportunity to identify something which struck them in the sharing of another. This involves identifying what was significant, not expanding or commenting on it.
- Everyone should feel listened to, whether their idea strikes a chord with the group or not.
- The facilitator's task requires close listening and concentration in order to develop the summary. For this reason the facilitator should not contribute to the sharing process. If the facilitator wants to provide input, he/she may wish instead to join another group as a participant at another time or put in an individual response.
- The facilitator may need to bring the sharing back on track if it goes off at a tangent.

### **THE SCRIBE**

- The scribe may find it easier to stay out of the sharing in order to concentrate on recording what is said.
- Rather than attempting to record verbatim, the scribe should record key points in each person's sharing.
- It is less obtrusive if the scribe handwrites the notes, but can use a computer if legibility and speed are issues. The use of technology should be managed so that it does not inhibit the group's work.
- The scribe should record the facilitator's summary, and either submit the summary and their notes (see Submitting a Response page 8 of the Synod Participation Booklet), or make them available to whoever is submitting the group's response.