



Commitments for Prayerful Listening/Faith-Sharing

"Prayerful listening" is the generous practice of being deeply attuned to ourselves and to each other, seeking the wisdom of the Holy Spirit within us and within others.

- **We will listen generously** without needing to respond, fix, save or give advice. We will listen while putting the best interpretation possible on the words of the other.
- **We will refrain from judgment** while seeking understanding. Please refrain from cross talk until everyone has had a chance to speak.
- **We share from our own experience**, trusting that our story and insights are welcomed by the group.
- **We share where our heart is drawing us** in this moment and in this day, trusting the spirit to guide our words even though we can't share the whole context or story.
- **We agree to care for one another** by being mindful of the amount of time we each speak to make time and space for every voice at the table. (Try to limit your sharing to no more than 3 minutes. The timekeeper will be assigned to keep track of your sharing and will let you know when you exceed the limit.)
- **The diversity of the perspectives** and backgrounds of this group are a gift. Although we hold much in common, let us be honest about the differences in our experiences and see our distinctiveness as an opportunity to learn and grow from one another
- **We will honor confidentiality:** "What's said stays," and "What's learned goes."



Parish Retreat Option 1

Embracing Quiet Listening

This staff retreat format is designed to welcome people, to pray together, to build community, and to make connections. The intention is to make this retreat meaningful and relevant for the specific parish family at this point in time. Keeping this a time of quiet listening together for the movement of God's Spirit in everyone's own life and that of the community is the key to making this experience fruitful.

Considerations

Since this retreat format can be adapted to the particular needs of a staff, all content suggestions are suggestions. Feel free to swap content for other relevant texts, songs or themes that may be meaningful for the parish family.

The retreat should be facilitated by someone who is not on staff such as a Liaison or other outside person. Designed to be roughly 4 hours, the retreat would include lunch and could be schedule in a way to include an optional Mass **at the beginning of end of the retreat.**

Please select a theme for the retreat, which will be the anchor point for the day. Themes may include journey, companionship, community or hope. Once this theme is chosen, try to select music, prayers, scriptures and reflection questions that echo this theme.

Retreat Flow

- **Gather for social time**
- **Opening song**
Possible songs:
 - We Have Been Told
 - Gather Us In

- Lord of All Hopefulness
- Instrumental music
- **Opening prayer**
Possible prayers:
 - We Dare to Ask (See below)
 - Partners in the Gospel
- **Extended check-in**
How are you as you come to the retreat today?
Take time with this session as it lets people get to know one another.
Encourage the use of story or images. Could potentially provide a series of images for people to choose from and or have them share a photo from their phones. Or have people bring a photo or object with them. Creativity keeps it engaging.
- **Scripture**
Possible scriptures:
 - Come and See (John 1:35-39)
 - Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)
 - Come Away to a Quiet Place (Mark 6:30-32)
- **Points for prayer**
This could be a Lectio Divina or a short reflection by the facilitator.
- **Reflection**
Possible reflection questions:
 - What struck my heart in listening to this scripture?
 - What image or story came to me from my own life as I heard these words of Jesus?
- **Quiet time to reflect**
This is an extended time for people to focus on themselves. Offer opportunity to walk outside (if the weather cooperates), pray in the church, or just sit in silence.
- **Faith sharing**
Gather back to share experience with the larger group. This could be simply sharing a word or image or provide brief highlights of thoughts that came to mind.
- **Closing prayer / Grace**
Share a meal prayer.

- **Lunch**
Order in box lunches to make it special or enjoy a potluck!
- **Song**
Welcome people back from lunch with a song to help refocus the retreat.
Possible Songs:
 - We Have Been Told
 - Gather Us In
 - Lord of All Hopefulness
 - Instrumental music
- **Prayer**
"The Romero Prayer": Prophets of a Future Not Our Own
- **Scripture**
Possible scriptures:
 - Come and See (John 1:35-39)
 - Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)
 - Come Away to a Quiet Place (Mark 6:30-32)
- **Points for prayer**
This could be offered using Lectio Divina and/ or a short reflection by the facilitator.
- **Reflection**
Possible reflection questions:
 - Where do I see the Spirit at work in my parish/our community at this time?
- **Quiet time to reflect**
This is an extended time for people to focus on the community. This could be done alone or in pairs.
- **Faith sharing**
Gather back to share experience with the larger group. This could be simply sharing a word or image or provide brief highlights of thoughts that came to mind.
- **Closing prayer**
Possible prayers:
 - We Dare to Ask
 - Partners in the Gospel

Prayers

We Dare to Ask Unknown Author

We ask only a few things more, O God,
a few small, mustard-seed size, faithful, saving things:
to walk with you in each moment
without plotting for tomorrow,
and so to really consider the birds of the air,
and find the treasures hidden
in the round of the daily;
to learn by leaning into your Spirit
to be present to others without preoccupation,
to engage without having to win,
to disagree without being judgmental,
to accept outcomes without despair
to succeed or fail without misplacing hope,
to tune to the bracing hum of the stars,
to fathom enough
without dismissing fathomless mystery
of your creation, our brothers and sisters,
and the grace and mercy and power
of your embrace that holds close,
each small one of us,
And everything all together.
In Jesus name,
Amen.

From the USCCB: Prophets of a Future Not Our Own

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent
enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of
saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.
This is what we are about.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an
opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master
builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

This prayer was first presented by Cardinal Dearden in 1979 and quoted by Pope Francis in 2015. This reflection is an excerpt from a homily written for Cardinal Dearden by then-Fr. Ken Untener on the occasion of the Mass for Deceased Priests, October 25, 1979. Pope Francis quoted Cardinal Dearden in his remarks to the Roman Curia on December 21, 2015. Fr. Untener was named bishop of Saginaw, Michigan, in 1980.



Parish Retreat Option 2

Journeying Together: *A Reflection Process for the Leadership of our new Parish Family*

This sample retreat envisions four in-person sessions for leadership. It could be led by the new pastor or by anyone the pastor designates.

The four sessions could be conducted over a single day, as an overnight retreat (dinner together, an evening session, and continuing over the following day), or as a four-week process.

The retreat uses the synodal model of deep listening, starting with prayer, Scripture, and reflections from Pope Francis. Then the groups move into the synodal listening process.

Synodal Listening Process

In the first round, each participant takes an equal turn to share the fruit of his or her prayer, in relation to the reflection questions on the first page. *There is no response or discussion in this round;* participants simply listen to each person and attend to how the Holy Spirit is moving within oneself, within the person speaking, and in the group as a whole.

This is followed by a time of silence.

In the second round, participants share what struck them most in the first round and what moved them during the time of silence. Some dialogue can also occur, and the same spiritual attentiveness is maintained.

Once again this is followed by a time of silence.

Finally, in the third round, participants reflect on what seems to be resonating in the conversation. We reflect together on where the Holy Spirit is leading us, our parish, and our Church.

Session One: Opening Retreat

Sign of the Cross, Opening Prayer (or Mass)

Welcome - introduction along these lines:

- We are gathering at a pivotal time in history – both world history and parish history. As Pope Francis writes in *Let Us Dream*: “The change of era, accelerated by the coronavirus, is a propitious moment for reading the signs of the times. A gap has opened up between the realities and challenges we face and the recipes and solutions available to us. That gap becomes a space in which to reflect, question, and dialogue.”
- Through this four-session retreat process, we will reflect on what it means to be a parish, and where God is calling us as a new parish family.

Introductions

Ideally, if the group is not too large, this is done in the large group.

- Tell us your name and something about your name – how you got it, what it means, or what it means to you.

Within small groups

The groups should be designed to bring people together from across the parish family. The same groups can be maintained throughout, or a new small group can be formed for each session to give people more opportunities to connect.

Sign of the Cross

Scripture - Acts 2:42-47 (The early Church)

Reflection from Pope Francis:

The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters”. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented. (Pope Francis, Joy of the Gospel 28)

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Synodal sharing:

- **Round 1:** Share a story or memory of how your parish has been instrumental in your life. How have you encountered Christ in parish life?

- **Round 2:** What common themes emerged in Round 1?

- **Round 3:** Where might the Holy Spirit be calling us as a new parish family?

Concluding Prayer (a prayer for the new parish family)

Session Two: Accompanying Each Other

Sign of the Cross

Scripture - Luke 1:39-56 (Mary visits Elizabeth)

Reflection

The word "congregation" does not mean "a gathering of many people"- not even of many pious and reverent people. Even in such a group that unifying, simultaneously fortifying and fervent quality which is the essence of the true congregation might be lacking. Christ defines it: "For where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there am I in the midst of them." The Acts of the Apostles gives more details in its report on the days following Pentecost: "And continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread in their houses, they took their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and being in favor with all the people."

A congregation, then, exists when a number of people disciplined by faith and conscious of their membership in Christ gather to celebrate the sacred mysteries. Even then it does not flow effortlessly...

If there is to be a congregation, the believers must know what a congregation is; they must desire it and actively strive to attain it.. (Rev. Romano Guardini, 1885-1968)

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Synodal sharing:

- **Round 1:** Share a story of a time when your parish accompanied you—or failed to accompany you in the life of faith.
- **Round 2:** What common themes emerged in Round 1?
- **Round 3:** Where might the Holy Spirit be calling us as the new parish family? How can we become a community of accompaniment?

Concluding Prayer (a prayer for the new parish family)

Session Three – Living the Gospel

Sign of the Cross

Scripture - Luke 9:11b-17 (Give them some food yourselves)

Reflection

Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ. Here I repeat for the entire Church what I have often said to the priests and laity of Buenos Aires: I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37). Pope Francis (Joy of the Gospel 49)

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Synodal sharing:

- **Round 1:** Share a story or memory of when you experienced Christ outside of Mass, in serving or being served in Christ's name.
- **Round 2:** What common themes emerged in Round 1?
- **Round 3:** Where might the Holy Spirit be calling us as the new parish family to go forth in service?

Concluding Prayer

Session Four – Conclusion

Sign of the Cross

Scripture - Matthew 5:1-12a (Beatitudes)

Reflection from Pope Francis

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Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Presentation of what we heard: Leaders share a carefully crafted synthesis of the synodal conversations in Sessions 2-4, through words and images: what we shared about Encounter, Accompaniment, and Living the Gospel, and what we have learned about our new parish: our challenges, our opportunities, our mandates for the future.

Response: small group sharing (groups are mixed, not the same groups that met earlier)

- **Round 1:** Name one fear and one hope you have in this time of transition.
- **Round 2:** What leapt out at you in Round 1?
- **Round 3:** Where do we go from here as a new parish family?

Large group: Invite people to share the fruits of the discussion around Round 3.

Conclude with a sign of peace, then concluding prayer or Mass.

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