



**PARTNERS
IN THE GOSPEL**

Document C2A: “Who do we want to become”? Listening Session Overview & Event Guide

Event Hosts: PFAC/PFLT or pastoral leader | Event Audience: Parishioners

Overview

When planning a future focused on the Church’s mission, it is crucial that the wider parish family community is engaged in answering the question of *who we want to become*. Because of this, start with one or more community-level listening sessions to engage the community. Ensure the Parish Family Advisory Council has ample time to prepare these discussions and turn the input received into actionable plans. (Learn about hosting prayerful listening sessions in [this video](#).)

Preparing for synodal listening

Start by reviewing what was discovered during the “Who are we?” work done previously as a foundation to frame the conversations around the listening sessions. The PFAC should pay special attention to information about the demographics within the parish and within the parish’s boundaries, and the list of current and past ministry offerings.

For the community synodal listening session(s)

Before this event, provide a report on the previous discussions by the community around the question of “Who are we?” as well as prompts for what will be discussed at the sessions. Ask the community to pray over these and come prepared to participate in the community discernment process. It is important for the community to be grounded in prayer with an understanding of who we are today before they begin the work of discerning who God is calling us to be. The vision is that this is a prayerful discernment – with conversation happening in small groups.

Book these listening sessions on the public events calendar and promote them widely – through Mass announcements, bulletins, digital newsletters, etc. Each parish should designate several people – staff or volunteers (such as people who facilitated the synod process in the parish) to help facilitate these sessions. If more help is needed, please reach out to the parish family liaison for assistance. The most effective size for small groups is between 5-8 people (not counting the moderator and/or notetaker) for facilitating conversation with sufficient listening and sharing from all in a prayerful manner.

For the PFAC sessions

Following each of the community synodal sessions, gather the PFAC to review the listening input. Provide each member with copies of this input and ask them to pray about what they heard. Hold a PFAC discussion about the community input, sharing what each member heard, and how their previous work combined with the input from

the community can inform the planning work. This PFAC session should generate a synthesis of the input to reflect back the voice of the community and for everyone to use when creating a vision statement and initiatives. Additionally, if the pastor, PFAC, and/or PFLT needs additional support or training around any of the work being done, please contact your parish liaison for personalized assistance.

Setting Up

Every parish in the parish family should host at least one input session, ensuring the individual sessions include a wide array of people who represent the community. Depending on the parish, multiple sessions may be necessary - especially if there are different language needs. This could be done through individual sessions at each parish or in collective listening sessions at the parish family level, depending on staff and capacity.

Event Flow

This in-person listening session should last about two and a half hours. Be sure that each group designates a notetaker who can fill out the input form. (Recording the notes directly on a laptop is preferred. Hand-written notes are acceptable if that is not possible, but more difficult to work with in the future.) It is not necessary for groups to seek consensus - rather, each participant's voice should be captured. A recommended flow for the session is as follows:

Opening Prayer - 10 minutes

Begin with time for prayer and reflection, inviting the Holy Spirit to be part of this process.

Process Overview - 10 minutes

- The event host should start by reviewing the key findings from the "Who are we?" sessions and answer basic questions that arise.
- Following this, the hosts will provide an overview of the listening process, explaining the rounds, how the listening works and how feedback will be recorded.
- Hosts will invite people to break into small groups, ensuring each group has a notetaker to capture the feedback and input.
- The facilitator in each group will guide the synodal listening model process.

There are three main rounds of listening.

- In the first round, each person will take an equal turn to share their thoughts.
- There is no discussion or response in this round; all participants simply listen deeply to what each person has to say.
- A time of silence follows, as each person pays attention to how the Holy Spirit is moving within them, the people speaking, and the group.
- Each person is invited to briefly share what stood out for them in the first round. This pattern is repeated with a second and third round of listening.

Questions – 10 minutes

The event host then provides an overview of the questions, why those questions are being asked, how the PFAC is working in this area and how the input from this session will guide future planning.

Small Group Listening and Discussion – ~90 minutes

Please be sure to make space for everyone to share their thoughts, while also keeping an eye on the time. Start with very brief introductions, pose the first question, and then invite people to a few moments of silence before sharing begins.

Round One - 20 minutes

Each person shares once with equal time for each participant.

Who is God calling us to become as a new parish? What is our vision?

Round One Summing Up -3-5 minutes

Each person shares once – this could be one word or one sentence.

What did I hear? What is one theme that stood out from the listening?

Short Break -5 minutes

The facilitator should read the next prompt and ask people to reflect on and pray over it during the break. Inform them of the time that the next round of listening will begin.

Round Two - 20 minutes

Each person shares once with equal time for each participant.

What new groups of people do we want to focus on or prioritize moving forward? Who have we not been serving?

Round Two Summing Up - 3-5 minutes

Each person shares once. This could be one word or one sentence.

What did I hear? What is one main theme that is staying with me from listening to what people shared?

Pause for Prayer - 3 minutes

The facilitator should read the next prompt and allow three minutes for everyone to consider and pray over it before sharing.

Round Three - 20 minutes

Each person shares once with equal time for each participant.

What new ministries and/or programs do we want to start, or what existing ministries should we expand to fulfill our vision of who we want to become? What existing ministries may God be calling us reconsider or leave behind? Is there anything we should stop doing or say “no” to so that we may say “yes” to new ministries?

Round Three Summing Up -3-5 minutes

Each person shares once. This could be one word or one sentence.

What did I hear? What is one main theme that is staying with me from listening to what people had to share?

Free Conversation in Small Groups -10 minutes

Facilitator opens by inviting any feedback that people would like to share.

Concluding Prayer - 10 minutes

Bring everyone back together in a large group. Conclude with prayer. Ensure notetakers turn in their physical or digital notes to a PFAC member before leaving. For examples of how to open and close a consultative session prayerfully, consult the Archdiocese of Seattle's