

## SESSION 3

### COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT & PARTICIPATORY DECISION MAKING

#### THEME

*Communal Discernment & Participatory Decision-Making*

#### PREPARATION

Please read the following homily of Pope Francis before Session 3:

[Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis](#) - Encounter, Listen, Discern



#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*Participants will:*

- Have opportunities to use the skills of synodality: Encounter, Listening, Discernment, Participation, and Accountability
- Consider how decision-making can be an inclusive process involving many people, even when the final decision is the responsibility of one or a few people
- Reflect on the participative decision-making in the early Church
- Experience the contemplative dialogue or spiritual conversation process in which a community invokes the Holy Spirit to guide their collective thoughts, feelings, and actions
- Consider how communal discernment and participative decision-making are essential to synodal leadership

## OUTLINE – 120 MINUTES

Overview	5 Minutes
Revisit the Prior Session	15 Minutes
Scripture Reflection	25 Minutes
Presentation	15 Minutes
Personal Reflection	5 Minutes
Breakout Group Discussion	25 Minutes
Report Outs	5 Minutes
Concluding Commitments	10 Minutes
Closing Prayer	10 Minutes
Looking to the Next Session	5 Minutes

## SESSION 3 CONTENT

### OVERVIEW

05 min 

- Welcome
- Review the objectives and agenda for the session

### REVISIT THE PREVIOUS SESSION

15 min 

*In groups of three or four people, discuss the following questions:*

- Did you practice using what you learned in the last session?
- Did you experience a greater awareness of how you listen in various aspects of your life or consider Otto Scharmer's four levels of listening (downloading, factual, empathetic, and generative) and
- Discerning Leadership's fifth level (contemplative) added as a faith dimension.

Why is active listening so crucial for leadership in the Church?

### SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

25 min 

As the scripture passage is proclaimed, listen for how the first Christians are beginning to practice what we now call synodality.

- Encounter - Open to solidarity with people who are different from you
- Listening - Seeking to understand one another's perspective
- Discernment - Making space for the Holy Spirit

*Council of Jerusalem: Acts 15:1-21*

Some who had come down from Judea were instructing the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved." Because there arose no little dissension and debate by Paul and Barnabas with them, it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and presbyters about this question. They were sent on their journey by the church, and passed through Phoenicia and Samaria telling of the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, as well as by the apostles and the presbyters, and they reported what God

had done with them. But some from the party of the Pharisees who had become believers stood up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and direct them to observe the Mosaic law.”

The apostles and the presbyters met together to see about this matter. After much debate had taken place, Peter got up and said to them, “My brothers, you are well aware that from early days God made his choice among you that through my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness by granting them the Holy Spirit just as he did us. He made no distinction between us and them, for by faith he purified their hearts. Why, then, are you now putting God to the test by placing on the shoulders of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they.” The whole assembly fell silent, and they listened while Paul and Barnabas described the signs and wonders God had worked among the Gentiles through them.

After they had fallen silent, James responded, “My brothers, listen to me. Symeon has described how God first concerned himself with acquiring from among the Gentiles a people for his name. The words of the prophets agree with this, as is written:

‘After this I shall return  
and rebuild the fallen hut of David;  
from its ruins I shall rebuild it  
and raise it up again,  
so that the rest of humanity may seek out the Lord,  
even all the Gentiles on whom my name is invoked.  
Thus says the Lord who accomplishes these things,  
known from of old.’

It is my judgment, therefore, that we ought to stop troubling the Gentiles who turn to God, but tell them by letter to avoid pollution from idols, unlawful marriage, the meat of strangled animals, and blood. For Moses, for generations now, has had those who proclaim him in every town, as he has been read in the synagogues every sabbath.”

## BREAKOUT GROUP DISCUSSIONS

*For 15 minutes, discuss these questions in your breakout groups:*

- How were the community members in the passage including the Holy Spirit in their discussions?
- Was there time for silent discernment?
- How were people encountering one another?
- How were they listening to one another to understand differing perspectives?

## REPORT OUTS

What were some of the insights from your breakout group on the discussion questions?



## A TOOL FOR DISCERNMENT - SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

### *A Spiritual Conversation:*

- Meaningful conversation rooted in active listening
- Relaxed grip on certainty; attention to possibilities
- Paying attention to deep meaning
- Inviting the Holy Spirit to lead
- Transformative conversation

### *Participation in Spiritual Conversations*

- Be brief... share what matters most
- Each person shares once before anyone speaks a second time
- Share the time so everyone can speak
- Speak slowly and intentionally
- Allow pauses; silence is okay
- Look at the person speaking
- Listen without preparing a response
- Seek to build on other people's contributions and not debate
- There is no need to convince anyone of anything – only to deepen our understanding

### *Individual Responsibility for Group Reflection*

- Ask the Spirit to guide your thoughts
- What word or phrase touched me?
- What energized me?
- Where do I feel resistance?
- What two important things do I want to remember when I go home?

## COLLECTIVE DISCERNMENT

*As a group, we listen for how our individual contributions are beginning to create a shared understanding:*

- What are *we* saying, collectively? What do *we* think?
- Where do *we* note the Holy Spirit leading or calling us?
- What new possibility is emerging?
- What essential points are emerging?
- What needs to be shared with the whole group, for the good of the whole?

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

05 min



*Take five minutes of quiet reflection with these questions:*

- In my ministry or life, I can leave room for the Holy Spirit by...
- In my ministry or life, I can encounter people of different perspectives by...
- In my ministry or life, I can better understand people with different perspectives by...

*Please be prepared to share your responses in your breakout group.*

## BREAKOUT GROUP DISCUSSION

25 min



Part I - 10 min

Please briefly share your personal reflection responses in your breakout group.

Part II - 15 min

Now, look for common aspects of one another's insights. What were common elements from among each person's insights on:

- Leaving room for the Holy Spirit at meetings and other activities
- Encountering people of different perspectives in my ministry/life
- Understanding people with different perspectives

*Consider how these could become ground rules for you in your ministry or other relationships in your life.*

## REPORT OUTS

05 min



Share one insight or highlight from your breakout group.

## CONCLUDING COMMITMENTS

10 min



Let us consider how the early Christians discerned the Spirit. What is one way you will invite the Holy Spirit to guide the decisions you will make with others in the next two weeks? How will you invite the Holy Spirit to guide your collective decisions in the next two weeks? All participants are encouraged to make a commitment.

## CLOSING PRAYER

10 min



Does anyone have a prayer request or prayer intentions to offer?

## LOOKING TO THE NEXT SESSION

05 min



Session Four : Paths to Transformation: Overcoming Biases and Assumptions

Before the next session, read the following 4-page document on Spiritual Conversation:

[The Spiritual Conversation](#) - Vatican Secretariat for the Synod



As you consider the question below, write down some notes to share in the next session: Can you think of ways to introduce the method of spiritual conversations into your life or ministry?

THE END OF  
SESSION 3