

## SESSION 4

### PATHS TO TRANSFORMATION OVERCOMING BIASES AND ASSUMPTIONS

#### THEME

*Paths to Transformation: Observing Biases and Assumptions*

#### PREPARATION

Please read the following four-page document on Spiritual Conversation before Session 4:

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



#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*Participants will:*

- Invite the Holy Spirit to guide our conversations
- Get to know one another more fully
- Listen openly to one another's values
- Connect personal values to a shared mission
- Examine assumptions and biases and practice a technique for recognizing them
- Understand how unconscious assumptions and biases can inhibit our transformation
- Commit to practicing synodality in daily life

## OUTLINE - 120 MINUTES

Overview	5 Minutes
Revisit the Prior Session	15 Minutes
Scripture Reflection	15 Minutes
Breakout in Pairs for Discussion	15 Minutes
Presentation	20 Minutes
Breakout Group Exercise	20 Minutes
Report Outs	10 Minutes
Closing Commitments	10 Minutes
Closing Prayer	5 Minutes
Looking to the Next Session	5 Minutes

## SESSION 4 CONTENT

### OVERVIEW

05 min 

- Welcome
- Review the objectives and agenda for the session

### REVISIT THE PRIOR SESSION

15 min 

*In your breakout groups, have a conversation using the following questions:*

1. Were there any ways you introduced the method of spiritual conversations into your ministry or other aspects of your life?
2. Were there any new insights you had from reading the article?

### SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

15 min 

*Put Away Sin and Put on Virtue: Colossians 3:8-14*

But now you must put them all away: anger, fury, malice, slander, and obscene language out of your mouths. Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.

### BREAKOUT GROUP REFLECTION QUESTION

*Take about **12 min** in your breakout group to discuss the following question:*

Saint Paul addressed his letter to the congregation at Colossae in response to spreading false teachings in the community. Paul insists that false teachings are “shadows;” Christ is “reality.” Paul talks about vices to “put away” and virtues to “put on” as if they were garments. If we use the same analogy for synodality, what would we put aside, and what would we put on?



## INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION: MY VALUES AND VIRTUES

Knowing our values helps us to be more firmly rooted and joyful, even amid turmoil. During this session, we will discuss the importance of not being enclosed in our convictions, assumptions, and biases. Being open to other perspectives requires humility and vulnerability. Embracing a clear set of values strengthens us for the humility and vulnerability that synodality requires. Being open to other people's perspectives does not mean forgetting your values.

Take **5 min** of individual, quiet reflection and read the values below. From the list or drawing on any other values that are significant to you, choose three that are most important.

Achievement	Adventure	Autonomy	Belonging
Patriotism	Community	Competency	Creative
Curiosity	Determination	Fairness	Charity
Faith	Fortitude	Friendships	Honesty
Hope	Humility	Integrity	Joy
Justice	Kindness	Loyalty	Peace
Pleasure	Prudence	Power	Recognition
Respect	Status	Temperance	Wisdom

## DISCUSSION IN PAIRS

Tell your partner your three values. Choose one and describe why this value is essential to you.

(About **5 min** each person)



## POPE FRANCIS EXPLAINS SYNODALITY<sup>1</sup>

*In his address to the Roman Curia in December 2021, Pope Francis said:*

“During the opening of the synodal assembly, I used three key words: participation, communion and mission. These arise from a humble heart: without humility there can be neither participation, nor communion, nor mission. Those words are the three requirements that I would like to indicate as a style of humility at which we here in the Curia should aim. Three ways to make the path of humility a concrete path to follow in practice.

First, participation. This ought to be expressed through a style of co-responsibility. Certainly, in the diversity of our roles and ministries, responsibilities will differ, yet it is important that everyone feel involved, co-responsible for the work, without having the depersonalizing experience of implementing a programme devised by someone else. ... Authority becomes service when it shares, involves and helps people to grow.

The second word is communion. This does not have to do with majorities or minorities; essentially, it is based on our relationship with Christ. We will never have an evangelical style in our respective settings unless we put Christ back in the centre, not this or that party opinion: Christ at the centre. Many of us work together, but what builds communion is also the ability to pray together, to listen together to God’s word and to construct relationships that go beyond work and strengthen beneficial relations between us by helping one another. Otherwise, we risk being nothing more than strangers working in the same place, competitors looking to advance or, worse yet, forging relationships based on personal interests, forgetting the common cause that holds us together.

The third word is mission. This is what saves us from falling back on ourselves. Those who are turned in on themselves, ‘look from above and from afar, they reject the prophecy of their brothers and sisters, they discredit those who raise questions, they constantly point out the mistakes of others and they are obsessed by appearances. Their hearts are open only to the limited horizon of their own immanence and interests, and as a consequence they neither learn from their sins nor are they genuinely open to forgiveness. These are the two signs of ‘closed’ persons: they do not learn from

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<sup>1</sup>-Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To The Roman Curia, Benediction Hall, 23 December 2021

their sins and they are not open to forgiveness. This is a tremendous corruption disguised as a good. We need to avoid it by making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor,' (Evangelii Gaudium, 97). Only a heart open to mission can ensure that everything we do, ad intra and ad extra, is marked by the regenerating power of the Lord's call."

## A TOOL FOR OPENNESS TO OTHERS

As Pope Francis points out, we cannot be open to one another if we are enclosed in our convictions. Synodality requires a posture of vulnerability and openness rather than "enclosed in our convictions."

We must effectively discern our biases and assumptions by being reflective and curious. The following is the typical thinking pattern for a non-reflective person:

- *My beliefs are the truth.*
- *The truth is obvious.*
- *My beliefs are objective.*

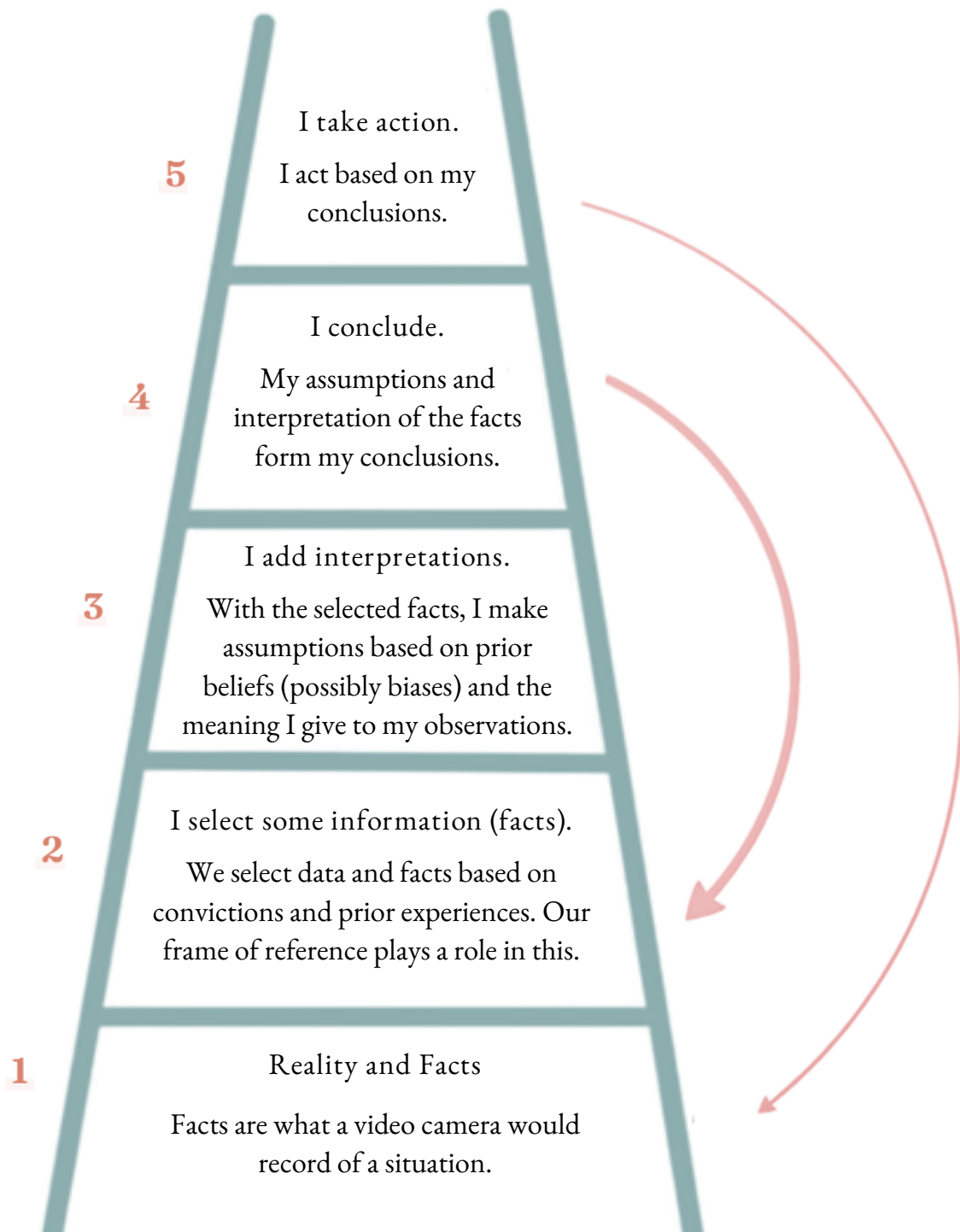
We all have biases. We must be aware of our biases and assumptions so they do not control us, and begin to think more creatively and collaboratively. Here is a way we can be attentive to the assumptions and biases we are forming:

- I am called to acknowledge that I have biases. Then, I educate myself about the people, culture, or organizations I hold biases about.
- I am called to let other people challenge my assumptions.
- I am called to be open to feedback.
- I am called to embrace diverse perspectives. To be curious and seek information from various sources.

## LADDER OF INFERENCE

Harvard Professor and organizational psychologist Chris Argyris proposed a model popularized by Peter Senge in [\*The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization\*](#) called "The Ladder of Inference." It describes the thinking process we go through, usually without realizing it, to get from a fact to a decision or action. Without reflective thought, we leap from facts to action, flawed by our assumptions and biases.





So why is this critical? It is critical for us to filter information, otherwise, we would be immobilized in data-overload. The problem is that we are typically unaware of how we select information, add meaning, make conclusions, and act upon our assumptions. If we are more aware of when we are operating from assumptions, there would be so much less resentment, misunderstanding, and inefficiencies in our family, ministry, community, and work. We are human, and so we will never think and act perfectly in this life. Awareness is the key to a healthier life and relationships.

## BREAKOUT GROUP EXERCISE



*Individually, take five minutes and jot down some responses to the following questions:*

1. When did you make an assumption or hold a bias and later realize it was inaccurate?
2. How can you encourage others to help you question your assumptions?
3. How could you use the Ladder of Inference to help you remain open to other people's perspectives?

In your breakout groups, take **15 min** to discuss a summary of your answers to the questions above.

## REPORT OUTS



1. What were a few salient points from each breakout group?
2. What are examples of how it could benefit our ministries if we helped people be more aware of the Ladder of Inference?

## CLOSING COMMITMENTS



1. What is your key takeaway from today?
2. What commitment do you want to make regarding openness and biases for the next two weeks?  
(Each person answers in the large group.)

## CLOSING PRAYER



Does anyone have a prayer request, perhaps for someone you know who is struggling or celebrating a blessing?

## LOOKING TO THE NEXT SESSION



Session 5 — A Framework for Leading Change: Adaptive Leadership



Please read the following 8-page article before Session 5:

[Becoming An Adaptive Leader - Lifelong Faith](#)

We will also discuss your insights on awareness of biases and openness to other perspectives.

## SOURCES

[Are You Aware of Your Biases?](#) Carmen Acton, Harvard Business Review, February 04, 2022.

[The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization](#), Peter M. Senge, Doubleday, March 21, 2006.

[Knowledge for Action: A Guide to Overcoming Barriers to Organizational Change](#), Chris Argyris, Jossey-Bass, 1993.



THE END OF  
SESSION 4