



LISTENING SESSIONS

Your Voice Matters.



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
SAINT PETERSBURG
COURAGEOUSLY
Living the Gospel

LISTENING SESSION GUIDE

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Welcome Message



“Your voice matters, and your participation will help shape how we, as the Church, continue to accompany families throughout our Diocese and the world.”

A Note of Welcome and Thanks From Our Bishop Gregory L. Parkes

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Thank you for being here and for your willingness to participate in this listening session. Your presence is a gift to our Diocese, and as your Bishop, I am grateful that you have taken the time to join us.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis reminds us that “the welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church.” He also encourages us to accompany families with compassion, recognizing both the beauty of family life and the challenges many encounter along the way.

This listening session is not about finding immediate solutions or debating ideas. It is about listening with respect, openness, and trust that the Holy Spirit is present among us. I encourage you to speak honestly, listen generously, and share from your own experience.

Thank you again for being here. Your voice matters, and your participation will help shape how we, as the Church, continue to accompany families throughout our Diocese and the world.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Gregory Parkes

Amoris Laetitia

Proclaiming the Gospel with Families Today

In 2016, Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Exhortation called *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) to Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Consecrated Persons, Christian Married Couples, and all the Lay Faithful...On Love in the Family.

It reflects on the pastoral care of marriages and families, drawing from global discussions held during two major meetings of the Synod of Bishops in 2014 and 2015. Along with Bishops, these Synods included some married couples, those working in family ministry, representatives from other Christian denominations, theologians, canon lawyers, and other clergy and religious superiors.

As the Church marks the 10th anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love), Pope Leo XIV has invited bishops from around the world to gather at the Vatican to reflect on the joys and challenges facing families today. To prepare for that meeting, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is seeking input from Catholics across the country. The Diocese of Saint Petersburg is participating in this process by holding several listening sessions. Your voice matters! Thank you for sharing your thoughts and for listening to others in regard to your real lived experience of love in the family and your desire and hope for accompaniment through the Church.



***“Love hopes all things.
Love does not despair of
the future.” It shows us
we can change and bring
about a better future.”***

-Amoris Laetitia 116

Synodality

The idea of a synod is not something new. Synods have been part of the life of the Church since the early Church, providing opportunities for Catholics to come together in prayer, conversation, and discernment. A synod is not simply “another program” or a “new initiative.” Rather, it is one way the Church lives out synodality—a way of being Church together.

“Synodality” describes a style of mutual listening, dialogue, prayer, and collective discernment. While this style is especially visible during a synod, it is meant to shape the life of the Church at every level and in every season.

At the heart of every synodal consultation is a spirit of respectful dialogue. Different perspectives and experiences are welcomed, even when we do not all agree. Through prayerful listening and discernment, we seek to recognize where the Holy Spirit is leading the Church and how God may be calling us to move forward together.



Schedule

Welcome, Introductions, Gathering Prayer

Purpose & Process of Listening Sessions/Video by Bishop

Prayer and Faith Sharing

Roles, Process, and Ground Rules for Listening and Sharing

Table Dialogue on Questions – Mutual Invitation and Conversations in the Spirit

Stretch Break

Table Discussions to Discern Common Themes

Large Assembly Sharing

Sending Forth Prayer

“If we accept that God’s love is unconditional, that the Father’s love cannot be bought or sold, then we will become capable of showing boundless love and forgiving others even if they have wronged us.” -Amoris Laetitia 108

Gathering Prayer

We stand before You, Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your name.
With You alone to guide us, make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it.
We are weak and sinful; do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.
Let us find in You our unity so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth and what is right.
All this we ask of You, who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son, forever and ever.
Amen.

Estamos ante ti, Espíritu Santo, reunidos en tu nombre.
Tú que eres nuestro verdadero consejero: ven a nosotros, apóyanos,
entra en nuestros corazones.
Enséñanos el camino, muéstranos cómo alcanzar la meta.
Impide que perdamos el rumbo como personas débiles y pecadoras.
No permitas que la ignorancia nos lleve por falsos caminos.
Concédenos el don del discernimiento, para que no dejemos que nuestras acciones se guíen
por prejuicios y falsas consideraciones.
Condúcenos a la unidad en ti,
para que no nos desviemos del camino de la verdad y la justicia, sino que en nuestro peregrina-
je terrenal nos esforcemos por alcanzar la vida eterna.
Esto te lo pedimos a ti, que obras en todo tiempo y lugar,
en comunión con el Padre y el Hijo por los siglos de los siglos.
Amén.



Prayer & Faith Sharing

Helpful Guidelines for Prayer and Faith Sharing

- Take time to be still, to get in touch with God who draws us together.
- It is not necessary to answer all the questions. They are there to guide.
- Remain silent until the Spirit prompts you to share, using “I” statements.
- Try to be comfortable with silence in the group between sharing.
- Listen to those who share; try not to be preoccupied with what you will say and how you will say it.
- It is not necessary to comment on another’s sharing.
- Each person shares once before anyone shares a second time.
- Leave space for each one to share; no one is obliged to share.
- Take a moment at the end of the sharing (before moving to action) to reflect on what each one has shared and the grace it might hold for you.



Prayer

Father of all, long ago you chose the people of Israel to make your name known to all nations.

Your Son Jesus Christ made it clear that forgiveness and fullness of life are the share of all who believe in Him.

Make your Church truly a place of encounter for all those who search for you, that all obstacles and barriers may be removed, and that the riches of all nations and cultures may reveal the thousand faces of the love you show us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Adapted from: Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A, Liturgy Alive, 2026 Bible Claret <https://www.bibleclaret.com/liturgy-alive/twentieth-sunday-in-ordinary-time/>

Gospel Matthew 15:21-28

At that time, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, “Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon.” But Jesus did not say a word in answer to her.

Jesus’ disciples came and asked him, “Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us.” He said in reply, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But the woman came and did Jesus homage, saying, “Lord, help me.”

He said in reply, “It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.”

Then Jesus said to her in reply, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And the woman’s daughter was healed from that hour. The Gospel of the Lord...

Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States, second typical edition, Copyright © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

Reflection: Persistent Prayer, Boundless Mercy

Jesus encounters a Canaanite woman who begs him to free her daughter from demonic possession. At first, Jesus remains silent and explains that his mission is directed to the

The Canaanite woman's faith is remarkable not because of her knowledge of religious teachings, but because of her perseverance. She approaches

Jesus with humility, refuses to give up, and continues to trust despite every apparent rejection. Her faith is expressed through prayer, persistence, and a personal relationship with the Lord rather than mere words or religious labels.

This Gospel invites us to examine ourselves. Are our hearts open and compassionate, or hardened by rigidity? Is our faith limited to beliefs we profess,

or is it lived through trusting prayer, perseverance, and loving action?

Adapted from: Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A, Liturgy Alive, 2026 Bible Claret <https://www.bibleclaret.com/liturgy-alive/twentieth-sunday-in-ordinary-time/>



Jesus exorcising the Canaanite Woman's daughter from Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, 15th century.

people of Israel. Using the image of children and dogs, he tests her faith. Undeterred, the woman humbly replies that even dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table. Moved by her unwavering trust, Jesus declares, "Woman, great is your faith!" and immediately heals her daughter.

This encounter reveals both the compassion of Christ and the power of authentic faith. Jesus' response shows that God's love is never rigid. Although his earthly ministry began with Israel, this moment foreshadows the universal salvation that would later embrace all peoples. Love is always attentive, creative, and open to the needs of others. Jesus allows himself to be touched by genuine faith and suffering, reminding us that true compassion is never closed to change.



Questions For Reflection And Group Sharing

1. What spoke to you most in the Gospel? Did it cause attraction or resistance?
2. How wide are the doors of our Church? Is there a place for everyone? Is there a place in your heart and life for everyone? What makes it difficult?
3. The woman in the Gospel shows great perseverance and faith. She was not going to be denied. Can you remember a time when your perseverance and/or faith gained you something you would not have gotten without those qualities?
4. Share a time when your own perseverance wasn't enough, but your faith in God's power saw you through.
5. What might the Holy Spirit be nudging you to notice or do in the near future?

Prayer

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

Listening & Sharing

Ground Rules for Synodal Listening

- We are here to listen to each other, not to persuade each other.
- We will be open to hearing about each other's emotions, especially as they are linked to our experiences.
- We will speak for ourselves, using "I" statements, connecting what we know and believe to our own experiences.
- We will avoid making generalizations or grand pronouncements.
- We will not try to represent a whole group, and we will not ask others to represent, defend, or explain an entire group.
- We will show respect and Christian charity to all. We will refrain from characterizing others' thoughts and feelings in a critical spirit.
- We will be mindful that each person is sacred, a dwelling of the Holy Spirit, and that our purpose is to discern the voice of the Spirit speaking in, with, and through each other.
- We will listen with resilience, "staying with it" even when something is hard to hear.
- We will share speaking time and refrain from interrupting others, keeping to established time limits.
- We will "pass" or "pass for now" if not ready to share—no explanation required.
- We only speak once until everyone has had an opportunity to share.
- We will respect the times of silence when we stop sharing to reflect and pray.
- We will keep what we hear in our small group confidential. Though a recorder will note ideas and concerns heard, we will not attribute statements to particular individuals by name or other identifying information.
- We will know that it's possible to leave this meeting with seeds planted that can keep growing in the days ahead.



Process for Small Group Sharing

As we begin the Small Group Sharing process, it's important to remember the Synod process involves active listening. Listening is at the heart of our conversation today. Remember to give your full attention to each other and listen to the voice of God in your heart. Listen to understand by taking to heart what other people share. As we share, individuals will speak, one at a time, without interruption while others listen. Please keep your responses to 1-2 minutes per person per question. Everyone will have a chance to speak or, if you like, you may choose to pass. We will invite each other to share using the **Mutual Invitation Process**.

Facilitators will guide the table session, enable each person to select and answer one question, and

monitor the time. The facilitator should ensure time is set to ensure everyone is on pace.

Recorders will write down what is shared pertaining to each question answered in the small group. They will share the common themes/consensus from the group in the larger assembly. At the end of the session, the table recorders will turn in their notes to the listening session host.

Each person is asked to share with the small group their response to one of the discernment questions (each person will have a choice as to which question they desire to answer). If time allows, after everyone has had the opportunity to share once, more questions may be answered.



Mutual Invitation Process

In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, we will proceed in the following way:

- A designated person will share first.
- After sharing, he/she will invite another person to share.
- Each person who is invited has two options:
 - **Share and invite.**
 - **Pass for now and invite.** The group will return to this person later.



Conversation in the Spirit Process

Begin with a few moments of silence to allow ourselves to ponder the question and jot notes as desired.

First Round of Conversation

Through mutual invitation, each person has a chance to speak (2 min. or less). There is no discussion in this round, and there is a time of silence to allow for reflection. Pick any question to respond to during this time. Recorders take notes on what question it refers to.

Second Round of Conversation (as time permits)

Share what struck you most or what resonated for you in the first round and what moved you during the time of silence. Once again this is followed by a pause for reflection. Recorders add to specific questions.

Third Round of Conversation

What moved you as an important theme? What are the common themes or fruits of our conversation? Recorders read themes that emerged. Look for consensus/common themes to share with the larger group. One person will share the common themes that emerged in the small group process.

Conversations in the Spirit – Questions

1

Families Today (Reality, Beauty & Challenges): When you look at families around you, where do you see a need for the Church to be more present?

“I thank God that many families, which are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfil their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way.” -Amoris Laetitia 57

2

Young People & Vocation to Marriage: How can our parishes walk alongside dating and engaged couples, as well as singles, to better address their joys, concerns, and ongoing discipleship?

“Young love needs to keep dancing towards the future with immense hope.” -Amoris Laetitia 219





3

Early Years of Marriage: What practical or spiritual tools helped you (or couples you know) navigate the transition from “me” to “we” in the first few years of marriage?

“Few human joys are as deep and thrilling as those experienced by two people who love one another and have achieved something as the result of a great, shared effort.” -Amoris Laetitia 130

4

Navigating Life’s Difficulties: What does “walking with” a struggling family look like in concrete, practical terms?

“Many are touched by the power of grace experienced in sacramental Reconciliation and in the Eucharist, grace that helps them face the challenges of marriage and the family.” -Amoris Laetitia 38

5

Christian Families in Mission: How can your parish better move families to mission, sharing their gifts of love, forgiveness, and care in outreach with the parish and larger community?

“Love always gives life.” -Amoris Laetitia 165



Large Group Report

What consensus or common thread emerged in regard to these questions?



Larger Assembly Sharing

Just as you heard one another in your small group, we now would like to hear collectively the common thread or consensus that emerged from your group.

The recorder or table facilitator is invited to answer with the larger assembly. Please take no more than 2 minutes. The answers should be based on what was heard during the small group sharing.

Recorder Guides will be returned to the Host/MC at end of the session.



Sending Forth Prayer

Prayer to the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
in you we contemplate
the splendor of true love;
to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families too
may be places of communion and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and small domestic churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
may families never again experience
violence, rejection and division;
may all who have been hurt or scandalized
find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,
and its beauty in God's plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
Graciously hear our prayer.
Amen.

Oración a la Sagrada Familia

Jesús, María y José
en vosotros contemplamos
el esplendor del verdadero amor,
a vosotros, confiados, nos dirigimos.

Santa Familia de Nazaret,
haz también de nuestras familias
lugar de comunión y cenáculo de oración,
auténticas escuelas del Evangelio
y pequeñas iglesias domésticas.

Santa Familia de Nazaret,
que nunca más haya en las familias episodios
de violencia, de cerrazón y división;
que quien haya sido herido o escandalizado
sea pronto consolado y curado.

Santa Familia de Nazaret,
haz tomar conciencia a todos
del carácter sagrado e inviolable de la familia,
de su belleza en el proyecto de Dios.

Jesús, María y José,
escuchad, acoged nuestra súplica.
Amén.

Stages of Family Growth Life Cycle

Single Adult Family

Establishing Family
(Courtship/Forming New Family Unit)

First Child in Family

School-Age Family

Adolescence and Family

Letting Go Family

Empty Nest Family

Aging Family

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