



## Three Ways to Listen on the Margins

It is an exciting moment in the Church! As part of a global [synodal process](#), Pope Francis has invited the Church to “journey together” in a two-year effort to listen and dialogue beginning in 2021 and concluding in 2023.

According to the [handbook](#) (*Vademecum*) on the synod process, it is essential that:

“We must personally reach out to the peripheries, to those who have left the Church, those who rarely or never practice their faith, those who experience poverty or marginalization, refugees, the excluded, the voiceless, etc.” (4.1 “Summary of what is envisaged in the diocesan phase”).

How can we “reach out” and “listen” on the margins? Here are three simple ideas.

**1. Ask “who is not around the table”?** If we want to ensure that those on the peripheries are included, a good starting point is to ask at the very beginning: Who is not around the table? Whose voice is not present or might be left out? Here are some examples:

- Those outside my institution’s predominant language group
- Undocumented persons
- Persons with disabilities
- Homebound parishioners and those in nursing homes
- Those on the rural “outskirts”
- Persons who are detained or incarcerated
- Recently-arrived individuals, including refugees and immigrants
- Young people
- Families in situations of economic hardship
- Historically marginalized groups such as Native Americans
- Those impacted by natural disasters

- Clients of social service ministries
- Persons who are part of other faith traditions
- Those distanced from their local Catholic community
- Many others

**2. Go to the margins.** If your faith institution is organizing an opportunity for community members to gather in person for a listening opportunity as part of the Synod process, it is likely that many of the groups listed above may be left out, since significant barriers may prevent their participation (for example: language, mobility, distance, age, time, etc.). With this in mind, it is a best practice to consider ways to go out and meet people where they are so that their experiences and reflections are included. Here are some ideas:

- Invite ministry leaders from various language groups in the community to help with implementation of the synodal process.
- Train and commission ministry leaders to “go out” and encounter particular groups whose voices may not otherwise be included.
- Go to wherever people are already gathered: food pantries, vaccination clinics, immigration clinics, etc. Organize volunteers to engage those waiting in line through conversation.
- Set up a listening table/booth at parish festivals or events.
- Consider paper or online surveys to allow participation for those who cannot be present, or who don’t feel comfortable participating in person.
- Train and send volunteers to knock on doors and listen in the neighborhood surrounding your parish or institution.
- Organize a parish outreach to invite the input of those who were formerly present in your faith community but who are now distanced.

**3. Partner with those already present on the margins.** Don't be afraid to reach out and collaborate with community organizations that encounter and accompany persons on the margins on a regular basis. These partners can help reach those who otherwise might be absent, allowing a more expansive listening process that reflects a wide cross-section of voices. Be sure to consider the following:

- **CCHD-funded organizations.** CCHD, or the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, is the domestic anti-poverty program of the Catholic bishops in the United States. CCHD supports the work of 200+ organizations each year that support low-income leaders in their efforts to help their communities thrive. CCHD-funded organizations regularly engage in listening initiatives to get to know the needs of communities. Contact your [local CCHD coordinator](#) or visit [this map](#) to find out where community organizations can help you listen on the margins.
- **Catholic Charities** agencies operate in nearly every U.S. diocese, where they serve as the social welfare agency of the local bishop. 167 agencies comprise Catholic Charities USA, which works with its members as the domestic disaster relief agency of the U.S. Catholic Church. Collectively, over 15 million clients were served by Catholic Charities agencies in 2020 through its myriad services. [Find your local agency](#) to explore listening opportunities with those they serve.
- **Society of St. Vincent de Paul.** Last year, Vincentians gave over \$1.4 billion

in cash, in-kind, and volunteer services, to over 4.4 million people, helping them find shelter or avoid eviction, find dignified work, feed their families, and thrive. Close to 100,000 Vincentian volunteers in over 4,400 communities across the country provide emergency assistance to poor and vulnerable people and families through person-to-person home visits. Home visits could serve as an opportunity for listening on the margins. [Find your local St. Vincent de Paul program here.](#)

- **Prison ministries.** Many Catholics work or volunteer in prison ministry, accompanying those detained or incarcerated. Connect with local efforts in your diocese to reach this special population who may otherwise not have the opportunity to participate in the synodal process. [Find your local prison ministry program.](#)
- **College/university campus ministries.** Be sure to reach out to campus ministries at colleges and universities in your diocese. This collaboration can be essential in reaching young adults who can offer important perspectives as part of synodal listening.

The possibilities are endless. Let the Holy Spirit lead and get creative! With the Spirit's guidance and the hands of many, we can respond to the call to be a listening Church that journeys together on the margins.

Adapted from USCCB's [We Are Salt and Light Blog](#)