

# The Future Church Summit: Guidance for Table Group Dialogue

## How it will work

At the center of the Future Church Summit will be the dialogue and discernment that occurs through conversation in table groups. You will be guided through a series of questions, and each group will be invited to share insights and ideas by sending them via an iPad to the Theme Team. The role of the Theme Team is to synthesize the comments coming from all of the discussions and present back a list of common themes that represent the thinking of the whole group. At the end, all participants will be able to individually express preferences on priorities through a series of electronic polls, which will be compiled in the final Future Church Summit Outcomes document.

Your table group will be self-managing. You will choose people who can serve in the roles of process facilitator, time-keeper and recorder for your table. You can switch those roles as desired throughout the Summit. We will have a pool of trained facilitators who can assist your table group if needed, as well as several technical support people who can respond if you need assistance with the iPads. Please raise the relevant sign on your table if you need help during a session – or contact the facilitation team members directly if your table is running into significant ongoing difficulties.

What you need to bring is your willingness to fully engage with the process and to be open to sharing the best of what you have to offer and to receiving the gifts of others so that together you can co-create new insights and awareness for yourselves and for the wider church.

## Invitation to be present to the Holy Spirit moving within our dialogue and discernment

Engaging in the Future Church Summit will create opportunities for meaningful and creative dialogue. You are invited to be fully present to that of God in each person and to be open to the Holy Spirit manifesting through this process. This calls for being open-hearted and open-minded.

In preparation for the process and throughout, you are encouraged to be centered in the heart of your faith and in your love for each other and for the church of which you are a part, following truly in the path of Jesus Christ.

## Communication: “Speak so that others want to listen; listen so that others want to speak”

**Speak for ourselves.** No participant represents a whole group, and we will not ask others to represent, defend or explain an entire group.

**Be bold, with humility.** Move beyond politeness and / or rhetoric (saying what you always say or saying what you think you should say). At the same time, please avoid making “grand statements.” Instead, connect what you know and believe to your personal experiences, influences in your life or to specific sources of information.

**Listen with resilience and love,** “staying present” even if you hear something that is difficult for you. Embrace it as an opportunity to practice compassion, and expand your capacity to be present for that of God within each person.

**Seek to understand differences rather than to judge them.**

- Avoid making assumptions about the beliefs, values and motives of others. Instead, consider the possibility of testing the assumption by asking a genuinely curious question, such as: “Can you share more about why that is important to you?”
- Is there something someone said that you want to understand better? If you ask a question, be sure it reflects genuine curiosity and is not a challenge in disguise.
- Have you heard an apparent difference that disturbed you in some way? If so, first check to see if you understood it correctly. Then you might say what was disturbing and why. Or you might ask a question that is likely to surface the values or assumptions that underlie the difference.

**Be mindful of hurt.** We each experience conflict in the church differently and with differing impacts. For some, the experience has been exceedingly painful. Participating in this gathering is harder for some than it is for others.

**Discretion.** To enable all to speak freely, commit to treating each other's contributions with care when talking about the process outside your table group. If asked to keep something completely confidential, honor the request. **I**f your table group wishes, you can covenant to not attribute specific remarks to specific people or some other variant of confidentiality.

**Self-management.** Be careful to not interrupt others and be mindful of the amount of time you are speaking. Keep your points focused and short to enable others to speak.

**Find pathways to a connected conversation.** Aim to pick-up and weave a conversational thread when an interesting theme or idea has emerged that you would like to develop. Embrace a "yes, and..." approach to build upon ideas and thoughts offered by others. When you hear something that stirs fresh thoughts or feelings, share your learning points.