Toolkit:

How to Lead a Listening Session

What is a listening session?

A listening session is designed to collect information from participants about their experiences, observations, and ideas. It can be one of the most efficient ways of collecting data about a particular group in your local congregations, districts, annual conferences, or jurisdictional conferences. Leaders and facilitators should develop a short list of questions to present to the participants. Consider the time available and provide about 5 minutes per question. The questions should pertain specifically to the audience and be as broad or as specific as the audience requires. The listening session may be combined with another meeting, or it may be the primary reason for gathering.

Who participates?

Anyone may participate in a listening session. The more diverse the audience, the broader the responses. Listening sessions may also identify particular demographics in order to learn more about a particular population. Subgroups may be as broad as clergywomen, racial/ethnic women, young women, older women, women in leadership, or as specific as the members of a local church, youth groups, or the trustees. The demographics will help you identify patterns and trends among different groups.

Where can a listening session be held?

The listening session may be held during a lay or clergy session of the annual conference, an administrative council meeting, or during a retreat. There are no limits regarding where the session may be held. It is best to gather participants in a comfortable space, seated around tables, in rows of chairs, or in pews. Use a microphone to aid in hearing if the group exceeds 25 people.
**How do you host a listening session?**

There are several easy ways to host a listening session. The first method requires a facilitator and a note taker. This method works well in smaller groups where everyone has the opportunity to share and is comfortable doing so. The facilitator asks questions and participants freely offer their input, which is then recorded and projected on a screen or written on paper and displayed on a wall. The advantage of this approach is that the feedback can be used immediately for a planning or strategy session.

Another method is to hand out index cards and ask the participants to write their responses to the facilitator’s question on the cards, one card per question. This method allows for the greatest participation by individuals and avoids the intimidation of talking in front of a group. It is particularly useful when the listening session is being done with a large group, like a laity or clergy session of annual conference. In this method, the cards are collected and organized according to theme. The results emerge from the participants and are shared anonymously with them and possibly others at a later time.

You may also choose any combination of the methods described above. The listening session should be as efficient and comfortable as possible for the audience and the facilitator.

Most importantly, remember to pray at the beginning and end of your time with the group.

**Conclusions**

There are so many benefits to holding listening sessions. We hope you will take advantage of this useful tool and report the results to your church leadership, annual conference, and to the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

**Sample Questions**

Before you host your listening session, decide what information you want to collect. Below are a few sample questions you may consider, or create your own.

1. What leadership struggles do lay/clergy women face in our Church?
2. How do we encourage lay/clergy women to accept leadership positions in the Church?
3. What education and encouragement would help you be a better leader?
4. How did you become involved as a leader?
5. What can your Annual Conference COSROW do to support you?
6. What does the Church need to know about women in the church?
7. How can men and women work together to help encourage equality in leadership?