



Getting to the Conversation: Practicing the Art of Listening

Use this guide to help your leaders become better listeners. Feel free to use it as is or develop it into your own voice. For more resources like this visit us at <https://marathonyouthministry.com/ministry2go/>

0:00–0:07 – Opening Prayer

0:07 - 0:10 - Framing + Modeling

Start in prayer and then introduce the activity by naming the main idea

“Listening isn’t preparation for ministry—it is ministry. Now we get to practice being that kind of Church.”

Brief 2-minute mini-teaching:

Share a quick story or demonstrate a *bad listening moment* (e.g., you “fix” too fast, or interrupt). Then redo it the right way.

“Notice the difference between *hearing to reply* and *listening to understand*.”

This gives people a mental model before pairing up.

Explain the purpose again:

We’re learning to hear emotions, not just information. We’re practicing presence before we offer any solutions. This will be hard because there will be things they say that trigger thoughts and ideas. For some of you, there is a temptation to relate and insert yourself in their situation. For others, you’ll feel uncomfortable and want to offer solutions. Don’t ignore those feelings, take note of them and do your best to make yourself present to that person. Okay, let’s begin:

0:10–0:30 – Practice Round 1 (basic listening)

- Remind them: listening ≠ fixing.
- Quote Emmaus: “*What are you discussing as you walk along?*”
- Give them the 3 listening rules (show on slide or handout):
 1. Ask open-ended questions.
 2. Listen for emotion, not information.
 3. End with, “Thank you for sharing that with me.”

Prompt: “Share one of the biggest challenges you’re facing in your ministry or parish right now.”

Flow:

- (1 min) Pair up
- (1 min) Review instructions on screen
- (4 min) Round 1
- (1 min) Switch roles
- (4 min) Round 2
- (5 min) Debrief together

Add a 3-minute quick-write before debrief:

“Jot down one moment that felt awkward or one thing you noticed about your own reactions.”

Whole-group debrief prompts (same as before):

- What made listening difficult?
 - What did you notice about your instinct to fix or defend?
 - What surprised you about what you heard?
 - What would help you create this kind of space back home?
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0:30–0:40 – Practice Round 3 (context + challenge)

Introduce **new, layered scenarios** that demand empathy and context learning — these tie directly to Keys 4 and 5.

New Scenario	What to Emphasize
A volunteer ready to quit because they feel unseen	Practice <i>trust and healing</i> listening
A teen questioning Church teaching on inclusion or justice	Practice <i>listening without fear of disagreement</i>
A parent overwhelmed by life balance	Practice <i>learning their world before suggesting solutions</i>

Twist: After listening, the “listener” must summarize back:

“Here’s what I heard you say... did I get that right?”

This reinforces reflective listening.

Run 3 rounds (4 min each) + 2 min reset + 4 min short table share.

0:40–0:45 – Integration Reflection

Move them into **small groups of 3–4** to synthesize learning.

Prompts:

1. What’s one behavior you’ll change in your ministry conversations this month?
2. What structure or habit can your parish adopt to make this kind of listening normal?
3. How could you train volunteers to do what you just practiced?

Close with this phrase and prayer

“That quiet space you just practiced—the pause before speaking—is the same space where hearts start to burn.”