

Online Spiritual Conversation

A short guide for group leaders and facilitators



Before the meeting

Prepare a meeting invitation with Zoom, Skype or Microsoft Teams or any other online meeting tool you are familiar with and send it in advance to the participants. The number of participants should preferably be limited to no more than 8-10 persons at a time.

If your participants are in different time zones, make sure you specify the meeting time's zone in the meeting invitation.

Set a clear purpose for the meeting. It can be for example:

- To share on a Scripture passage that everyone has prayed with prior to the meeting and thus experience communally Christ's presence in the Word of God,
- To discern God's presence and action in our personal and communal life and strengthen the level of communion among us and with the Lord, even as we are spread apart,
- To move forward on a specific question that the group is facing and to start listening together where the Spirit might be leading the group (this might involve more than one conversation)

Of course, these are just a few examples. Spiritual conversation is a versatile tool that can be applied to different settings and there can be other purposes depending on the state of your group and what you hope to accomplish. The Service for Discernment in Common can assist you with defining an appropriate process for your group.

As much as possible, ask each participant to prepare in advance a written contribution, as this greatly enhances the quality of the conversation.

When the meeting starts

As participants gather online, ask them to put their microphones on "mute" while waiting for the conversation to start.

When participants have all joined, recall the purpose of the conversation and what you hope to accomplish.

Present how the conversation will unfold:

The facilitator will lead the group in the conversation and call participants to share, one at a time, following a set order, which does not have to be alphabetical, but needs to be presented before the conversation begins: "We will start with Mary, and then John and then James etc." so that everyone knows when they will be invited to share. Only the person invited to share talks, while the others listen and remain on "mute".



Service for Discernment in Common
Service pour le Discernement en Commun

Each person speaks for a set amount of time, 1-2 minutes max (as it is harder to keep one's focus when attending an online meeting). The facilitator discreetly signals when time is up and make sure that every participant has an equal time to share.

Participants share at the level of personal experience, not about general considerations. A tip to make sure this is the case is to start sentences with "I felt..." "What came to me was..." "I experienced..."

Since the goal is to try to perceive what emerges from the different personal contributions, participants do not reply or add to what has been shared by other people, they speak from their own experience.

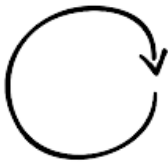
It is of course possible to remain silent and indicate that one does not wish to share.

Remind the group that a spiritual conversation involves paying attention to our personal and communal affective and emotional responses to what is being shared. This requires a high level of attention, care and reverence for all participants (oneself included) during the conversation.

The conversation

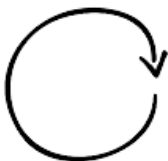
Start with an introductory round of "checking-in", allowing each person to share briefly how they feel at this moment. This allows everyone to "settle in" and to get a sense of the "interior place" from which each person is talking. This makes each participant feel welcome, just as they are and prevents strong feelings from taking over the conversation.

1st round of sharing about insights received in prayer



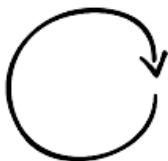
The facilitator invites everyone to share what they have prepared in advance. Participants speak in turn, following the order that the facilitator has presented at the beginning. After everyone has had a chance to talk, the facilitator invites the group to pause for a few minutes to reflect on what resonated the most, what was the most powerful in what has been shared.

2nd round of sharing about what touched me the most in what was shared during the 1st round



Follow the same process using what was shared during the 1st round as the input. The facilitator invites participants to share about what affected them most in what was shared during the 1st round. Again, this is at the level of one's experience: "What touched me the most was..." After everyone has spoken, pause for a few moments to reflect on what seems to be converging or emerging at this stage.

3rd round of sharing about what seems to be converging or emerging at this stage and/or about what we are grateful for



For this round, the facilitator invites participants to share about what they heard in terms of convergence, commonalities, renewed perspectives...

Conclude with a short prayer of thanksgiving for the time of sharing.

