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# A GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

### About this document

The purpose of this document is to provide a framework to inspire dialogue on questions leading to the Synod. This is not a prescribed model but a starting point for anyone desiring to contribute to the synodal process.

We encourage the framework of Spiritual Conversations to guide the listening and discussion. The reflections and feedback gathered will be synthesised to inform the agenda for the Synod in October 2023.

## Introduction

“What is happening in the other person and in me, and how is the Lord working here?” This is the question we’re invited to consider as listen, reflect, discern, and discuss questions and topics towards the Synod.

The spirit of God is at work today. God is active, alive, and moving in and out of the world, the church and us. To understand this, we must work together with God by acknowledging its God’s presence in everything we do. When we desire God’s presence, we become spiritual collaborators with the Holy Trinity who help combat differences of opinions and negative thoughts towards others.

The focus of spiritual conversation is on the person to whom we are listening to, on ourselves, and what we are experiencing on a spiritual level.

Spiritual conversations create an atmosphere of trust, welcome and being respectful to others as they are. Being intentional in our listening and speaking encourages a free expression of the heart while internally, taking seriously what happens within.

This interior attentiveness is an awareness of the presence and workings of the Holy Spirit within the conversation, prompting to ourselves the question, ‘what is happening in the other person and in me, and how is the Lord working here?’

The following provides a brief outline on *Intentional Listening* and *Intentional Speaking*.

### Intentional Listening

To be a collaborator with the Holy Trinity is to intentionally listen to others with an open heart. Through being intentional, the goal is to try and understand the other with humility, patience, and no judgment. This requires one to acknowledge and rise above personal differences, opinions and calls us to hear beyond just words but seek an understanding of what the other might be experiencing emotionally and spiritually.

We must listen in a way that is “more disposed to giving a good interpretation to what the other says than condemning it as false” (Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, no. 22). To practice intentional listening, one must believe that the Holy Spirit speaks to them through the other person.

### Intentional Speaking

Intentionally speaking is a sincere expression while being self-aware of how you are responding interiorly to others. When we are intentional with our words, our body language and facial expressions mirror the attentiveness and self-motives are let go in this process. Sharing the truth of what you are experiencing and feeling is important, but it is also essential to acknowledge how the spirit is moving in your thoughts and words.

### Key points

- Be present to the space and time that has been set aside
- Acknowledge the work of the Spirit facilitating deeper communion through dialogue and presence
- Strive to recognise God in each other
- Listen with openness and without judgement
- Express your experiences, thoughts, and reflections with clarity and charity

## STEPS FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION

### 1. Prepare and Pray

It is essential to spend personal time with God through prayer and discernment. Reading scripture, listening to worship or simply being silent will help you focus and present for the spiritual conversation ahead. Choose what form of prayer makes you feel most comfortable. You may choose or be given the question to ponder and reflect on.

### 2. The First Round

Ask all involved to take three deep breaths in and out to welcome God into the conversation. This establishes the seriousness of what is happening while welcoming the holy Trinity and its inner workings. As the listener, be reminded that this is not about you, but about what God is revealing in this present moment.

Each person takes turns to share about what happened during the personal prayer time and shares the fruits of his or her prayer. This includes reflections on the question chosen for discussion.

Everyone is given the same amount of time to speak (e.g. 3 minutes).

The focus is to listen to one another rather than simply think about what one wants to say. As the listener, it is important for you to prompt words or questions for you to clarify any misunderstanding. Take note of body language and tone of voice.

Participants are invited to open their hearts and minds to listen to the one who is speaking and be attentive to how the Holy Spirit is moving.

Between each person, a brief pause may be needed to absorb what was said. During this round there are no discussions or interactions between participants except to ask for clarification about a word or phrase if necessary.

### 3. Silence

A time of silence is observed, during which participants attend to how they have been moved during the first round, what struck them as they listened, and what were the notable points of consolation or desolation if any

Take a moment to pause for a few minutes in silence and reflect on what the speaker was conveying while the speaker ponders on what they have shared. You may prompt this by saying something like, "We're now going to pause for a few minutes and reflect on what we've just heard."

If what was shared does not align with your values and/or makes you feel uncomfortable, ask yourself, 'What is God trying to convey through this person and how can peace, justice and reconciliation attend to you during this moment?'

#### **4. The Second Round**

In this second round, participants share what emerged within them during the time of silence. No one is obliged to speak, and participants can share spontaneously without any particular order. This is not a time for discussing or refuting what someone else says, nor for bringing up what participants forgot to mention in the first round. This second round allows people to identify what unites each person. It is here that signs of the action of the Holy Spirit begin to manifest, and the conversation becomes an experience of shared discernment.

#### **5. Silence**

Another time of silence is observed for participants to note how they were moved during the second round, and particularly what key points seem to be emerging.

#### **6. The Third Round**

Participants share what emerged from the preceding time of silence. They may also take note of the ways in which the Holy Spirit may be moving.

A prayer of thanksgiving can conclude the conversation.

#### **7. Review and Report**

Finally, it is encouraged that a brief review and summary is discussed. This will help decide on the main points to include in the submission for the Synod. Submissions can be shared through the online portal available here: [www.parracatholic.org/synod2023](http://www.parracatholic.org/synod2023)