

## Collection for both July Presentations

### WHAT

#### ❖ **What are ‘Conversations in the Spirit’?**

- Similar Terms: Communal Discernment, Discerning Together, Spiritual Conversations
- Purpose: to understand and follow God’s will for a group. The process, however, could also be adapted for seeking God’s direction for an individual.
- A definition:
  - This method proposes a spiritual journey alternating moments of silence, prayer and listening, with moments of dialogue and identification of the “steps” that “the Spirit” is calling us to take together.

#### ❖ **Shift in paradigm and in practice**

- There is the hope that the daily life of parishes and dioceses will increasingly adopt this method.
- Decision-making but not Democracy or Dictator
- Meetings: Often Church meetings are no different than any other meeting, the Jaycees, the Board of Directors, a committee at work, etc. Church meetings just open and close with prayer.

### DISCERNMENT

#### ❖ **The Synodal Process** entails a **discernment** process oriented towards **consensus**. We **listen** to each other in order to discern what God is saying to all of us. This kind of discernment is not only a one-time event, but ultimately a way of life, grounded in Christ, following the lead of the **Holy Spirit**, living for the greater glory of God.

- Communal discernment helps to build flourishing and resilient communities for the **mission** of the Church today.
- Discernment is a grace from God, but it requires our human involvement in simple ways: praying, reflection, paying attention to one’s inner disposition, listening and talking to one another in an authentic, meaningful, and welcoming way.
- Discernment in this spiritual key plants seeds that can bear the fruits of fraternity, healing, communion, mission, and more. God comes to lead and inspire us as we seek to discern His will.

## HOLY SPIRIT

### Holy Spirit as Protagonist

- ❖ Pope Francis: “...*The synodal method is a spiritual experience, in which words and listening aim to ensure that the **Holy Spirit** is the true protagonist.*”
  - Must listen in depth within to the voice of the Holy Spirit.
  - In order for our discussions not to be just human discussions, drawing on our personal experiences, our expertise, our opinions, we need to be careful that we not miss the ‘deeper voice’, the subtle voice, the still, small voice.
  - That is, each person must sift through the ‘voices’ – sometimes strong – within us and share what comes from the Holy Spirit.
  - To this end, it is helpful to pause for a moment of silence during our meetings and ask again for the Holy Spirit to speak. To find inner freedom if we have been stirred up.

## LISTENING

- ❖ Pope Francis: “*Conversation in the Spirit, discernment and synodality consist, above all, in listening. The synodal path undertaken by the Church is a path of in-depth listening.*”
- ❖ Listening, but not just listening; listening **to the Holy Spirit**.
- ❖ Pope Francis has affirmed that: «A synodal Church is a Church which listens. [...] The faithful People, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other; and all listening to the Holy Spirit» (*Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015).
  - The International Theological Commission explained this central role of listening as follows:
    - “Synodal dialogue depends on courage both in speaking and in listening.
    - “It is not about engaging in a debate where one speaker tries to get the better of the others or counters their positions with brusque arguments, but about expressing whatever seems to have been suggested by the Holy Spirit as useful for communal discernment, at the same time being open to accepting whatever has been suggested by the same Spirit in other people’s positions, “for the general good” (1 Corinthians 12,7)” (ICT, *Syn.*, no. 111).

## HOW TO DO IT

### THE METHOD

#### 4 Steps in the Conversation in the Spirit

- ❖ 4 Stages and 4 Moments of Prayer
- ❖ 1. It begins with a “personal preparation” in prayer with the Holy Spirit to meditate on one’s future contribution on the issue being discerned.
- ❖ 2. Then comes the meeting, which begins with a moment of silence, prayer, and includes listening to the Word of God together. Then each member takes turns speaking, and above all listens attentively to others. This initial exchange is followed by a time of prayer and silence.
  - 2 minutes per person
  - All others listen, taking notes if you like.
  - No responses or feedback. Simply move to the next person.
- ❖ 3. Then, “each one shares what has resonated most with him or her or what has aroused the most resistance in him or her, allowing himself or herself to be guided by the Holy Spirit.” Each person is called to answer the question “when listening, did my heart burn within me?”
- ❖ 4. After a further period of prayer and silence, a dialogue takes place “on the basis of what has emerged earlier in order to discern and gather the fruit of the conversation in the Spirit.” In particular the text encourages those participating to “recognize the intuitions and convergences” to which the Spirit has led, but also identify “discordances, obstacles and new questions.” The aim is to “allow prophetic voices to emerge,” but also let everyone “feel represented by the outcome of the work.” The process concludes with a final prayer of thanksgiving.



## HOW TO DO IT – INTERNAL DIMENSION

### Inner Dispositions

- ❖ Pope Francis: *“Listening to the Spirit requires a certain internal attitude. Conversation in the Spirit, discernment and synodality can only take place if we try to empty ourselves to fill ourselves with the Spirit, if our freedom loosens our material, ideological and emotional moorings, allowing the Spirit to guide us more effectively; if we cultivate within ourselves attitudes of humility, hospitality and welcome, and at the same time we ban self-sufficiency and self-referentiality. Only in this way can our communion and our mission be strengthened.”*

### Personal Conversion

- ❖ Pope Francis: *“If everyone remains locked in the positions they had previously adopted, there will be no true conversation, nor true listening to the Spirit. He/she will not find anything that he/she can learn or assimilate from others and will be afraid of any decision that involves changes. In fact, it is only when we truly listen to each other that we emerge enriched and deepen our communion and mission.”*

### Vulnerability

- ❖ Pope Francis: *“The attitude...of “open and vulnerable listening”, is fundamental and very necessary, in fact it allows the Spirit to move us and make us change.”*

### ❖ **HOW? Attitudes, Effort and Virtues Needed:**

- Trust – We trust in God’s presence and action in our hearts and lives, in a the group, and in each group member.
- Justice – Every participant benefits from the same conditions and time.
- Communion – The goal is not putting forward one’s point of view at the expense of others, but to listen together to what the Spirit is telling us.
- Inclusion – Every person’s voice is important. Everyone’s voice is heard and valued.
- Reconciliation – We speak of our experiences, not ideas. This allows us to move beyond personal opinions to connect on a deeper level.
- To achieve this, certain attitudes clearly need to be cultivated. In a nutshell: Faith and trust in God, trust in others, listening, humility, prayer, dialogue and sharing, and inner freedom.
- Authenticity
- Vulnerability
- Courage
- Humility
- Patience
- Mutual Love

- Mercy, Compassion, Forgiveness, Starting Over Again
- In brief – the 'asceticism of love', self-denial, purification, conversion, growth.
  - Marriage as a metaphor. Loving calls us to grow, to self-denial, etc.
- Not just a 'Method' but Relationships
- ❖ **Bad Group Dynamics: Falling back into old patterns and habits**
  - Overcome Ideologies & Polarization
  - The desire to 'win'.
  - Lobbying without listening.
  - Fear of speaking up; being too timid.
  - Talking 'outside' of meetings but being silent in them.
  - Avoiding moving too quickly into a debate based on the reiteration of our own positions without listening first to the reasoning that supports the position of others.
- ❖ There are many benefits to cultivate

### **PARRHESIA**

- ❖ *Parrhesia* refers to the boldness that the coming of the Holy Spirit brought about in the hearts of the apostles at Pentecost. It is the inner courage that sent them out to proclaim the Good News that Jesus is Lord without fear in the days of the Early Church. The Spirit offers us this same boldness to carry out the mission of the Church today. *Parrhesia* is required in the Synodal Process so that we can listen humbly and speak boldly, inspired by the Holy Spirit as we journey forward towards this "new phase of evangelization" to which God calls us.
- ❖ «The *parrhesía* of the Spirit required the People of God on its synodal journey is the trust, frankness and courage to "enter into the expanse of God's horizon" in order to "ensure that a sacrament of unity exists in the world and that man is therefore not destined for dispersion and confusion"[169]. The lived and enduring experience of synodality is, for the People of God, a source of the joy promised by Jesus, a catalyst of new life, the springboard for a new phase of missionary commitment» (ITC, *Syn.*, no. 121).

### **CONSENSUS**

- ❖ Consensus does not mean uniformity or a democratic majority. If this was the case, this would ignore the fact that the Holy Spirit can speak through the words of one single member of the People of God or a small group. Rather, consensus in synodal key refers to the process of listening to one another in an atmosphere of prayer and interior freedom, in order to discern the common path that God is calling us to in a spirit of communion, guided by the Holy Spirit.

### **SENSUS FIDEI**

- ❖ The anointing of the Holy Spirit, conferred by Christian Initiation sacraments, is manifested in the *sensus fidei* of the People of God. «In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The People of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo*. This means that it does not err in faith, even when it cannot find words to explain that faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation. As part of His mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith – *sensus fidei* – which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively» (EG 119). This connaturality shows itself in a «*sentire cum Ecclesia*: to feel, sense and perceive in harmony with the Church. This is required not just of theologians, but of all the faithful; it unites all the members of the People of God as they make their pilgrim journey. It is the key to their “walking together” (ITC, *The Sensus fidei*, no. 90).

### **Communion, Participation and Mission**

#### **MISSION**

- ❖ Mission
  - Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process has a deeply missionary dimension to it. It is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world.

#### **COMMUNION**

- ❖ This “method” intends first to “communion”
- ❖ Conversation in the Spirit is not intended to be “a generic exchange of ideas,” but a “dynamic in which the word spoken and heard generates familiarity, enabling the participants to draw closer to one another,”
- ❖ Pope Francis: “*In the conversation in the Spirit we find a participatory path oriented towards communion and the renewal of the mission, which encourages the participation of all and welcomes in communion and unity the great diversity that we all are.*”
- ❖ The communion we share finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of the Trinity. Together, we are inspired by listening to the Word of God, through the living Tradition of the Church, and grounded in the *sensus fidei* that we share. We all have a role to play in discerning and living out God’s call for his people.
  - “The goal... is to understand the topic being explored and at the same time deepen group connection or community.

- ❖ Communion is the spiritual, sacramental and juridical bond that unites pastors with one another, pastors with the faithful and faithful with one another, on the model of Trinitarian communion. This bond, founded on common Baptism, is realized, manifested and strengthened in the common participation in the Eucharist.

### **PARTICIPATION**

- ❖ Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and are called to serve one another through the gifts they have each received from the Holy Spirit in baptism. In a synodal Church the whole community is called together to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will.
- ❖ A synodal Church is a Church of participation and co-responsibility. In exercising synodality she is called to give expression to the participation of all, according to each one's calling, ministry and charism. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ In the synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will. So, in coming to formulate their own decisions, Pastors must listen carefully to the views and experiences of the faithful.

### **❖ CONVERSATIONS IN THE SPIRIT AND SYNODALITY**