

Spiritual Conversation

What is it?

Spiritual Conversation is about the quality of listening and quality of speaking.

It means paying attention to the spiritual movements in the other person as well as in oneself during conversation, which necessitates attending to many other levels of what is being expressed.

Such a quality of attention is an act of reverence, welcome and hospitality for others as they are, and takes seriously what is going on inside the parties to the conversation.

It is composed of two foundational skills or practices: *Active Listening* and *Speaking from the Heart*.

What is the main purpose of Spiritual Conversation?

It is to create an atmosphere of trust and welcome so that people may more readily express themselves. It allows them to take seriously what is going on within them. This transparency makes the perception of spiritual movements easier and, eventually, the Spirit's involvement.

What is the focus of Spiritual Conversation?

The object of attention is the other person or person in the conversation and what they are experiencing as well as oneself and what one is experiencing. The basic question is: "What is going on in the other person and in me, and what is the Lord up to here?"

1. ACTIVE LISTENING

- Goal is to seek to understand others as they are.

+ Listening not only to what the other person is saying, but also to what they mean to say, and to what they might be experiencing interiorly. Above all it means listening with an open and receptive heart.

- + Such listening is called “Active” because it means paying attention to more than one level of expression of the other. To do so, one must be actively engaged in the process.
- + Listening to the other now as he or she is speaking, and not concentrating on what I will say next.
- + Welcoming, in a non-judgmental manner, whatever the person says, no matter what you think about what is being said, or what you think about the person. Each is an expert in their own experience. We should listen from the point of view of the Presupposition of the Spiritual Exercises, that is, to be “more ready to put a good interpretation on another’s statement than to condemn it as false.” *Spiritual Exercises n.22*
- + We should expect that the Spirit is speaking to us through the other person.
- + Non-judgmental welcome is a profound welcome of the other person in his radical uniqueness.
- + Active listening means allowing oneself to be affected by the other
- + Active listening is demanding, for it requires humility, openness, patience and involvement, yet it is a profound way of taking others seriously.

2. SPEAKING FROM THE HEART

- refers to the sincere expression of one’s self, of one’s experience, feelings and thoughts.
- + Speaking from one’s own experience and from what one is indeed thinking and feeling, while responding to the needs of active listening.
- + Taking responsibility not only for what one says, but also for what one feels. Not blaming the other for what you are feeling.
- + Sharing the truth as one sees or experiences it, not imposing it.

+ Speaking from the heart is self-giving, a free, generous offer of a gift to another, in reciprocity for being actively listened to.

This process presupposes a regular personal practice of the Examen of Consciousness (Awareness Examen). Without a habit of discernment and self-awareness of the operations of one's own freedoms and unfreedoms that grow with the practice of the Examen, then one can neither listen actively nor speak from the heart.

Format

Prayer or meditative time of quiet: Spiritual conversation usually begins by actively listening to yourself and to what the Spirit is doing within you at the moment. This will include some personal quiet time for prayer or reflection and will take one of two forms:

Check-in: Short check-in where you are invited to share with your group a word or two about how you are interiorly at the time of the meeting or gathering.

Prayer: Prolonged time of personal prayer and reflection on the question for discernment or decision, usually about 30 minutes. At the end of the prayer period, decide what you will share with the group.

The First round – each one will speak what has surfaced during the prayer (or a talk or presentation) and you will have 5 minutes during which to speak. Listen to the other – do not be thinking of what you are going to say. Open your mind and heart to the person speaking. As each person finishes pause for about 30 seconds to recall what was said. Then the next person will speak. The facilitator designates someone to begin after whom all will speak one after the other.

Pause for several minutes to review what you have heard.

The Second Round – popcorn round – you do not have speak, but you speak out in any order you wish. A typical second round sharing may be short,

often one or several sentences. Speak once only. This is not a rebuttal stage, it is not “what I forgot to say in first round stage”, but rather these are the questions you may be asking:

- How have you been affected by what you have heard?
- Were you struck by a common theme? By something absent that you expected to hear?
- Were you especially touched by a particular sharing?
- Did any insights occur to you? What were they?
- Where did you experience harmony with others while they shared?

It is the second round that enables the group to become aware of what is happening to itself as a group. This is where the signs of the Spirit acting in the group begin to manifest themselves, and where the conversation begins to take on a communal discernment quality.

Prayer to end the Spiritual Conversation.