



LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT

Growing Viable Parishes

Viable parishes have the financial, people, and property resources for their shared missionary vision, and can mobilise them effectively. They have sufficient income streams to grow their mission, providing and maintaining buildings to support the needs of their ministries.

Their diverse sources of income allow the sustainable service of their local communities. They are open to sharing their spiritual, ministerial, and material resources with others for the building of God's kingdom.

This resource is for you, the facilitator, to understand and guide your participants through the rhythms of a spiritual conversation. Feel free to use this guide as a basis for explaining the spiritual conversation process with your group.

Spiritual Conversations

Drawn from the Ignatian tradition, spiritual conversations are a way for groups of people to listen to the inner stirrings of their minds and hearts, to each other, and ultimately to the voice of the Holy Spirit, who is always an active participant. It is communal, prayerful, and a chance to practice the art of listening.

Spiritual conversations are not the space for argument or debate. They are about listening to the Scriptures, each other, and responding humbly and honestly to what is heard.

Spiritual conversations are not about coming up with big ideas or making plans, either. As a practice in listening, they are only the beginning. They are opportunities to be prompted, and to sense the emergence of any common themes or notable divergences. They prepare the ground for the work ahead.

The structure

For a spiritual conversation, participants are seated in a circle. If there are lots of participants, you may want to break into smaller groups with appointed facilitators for each. 6 participants are ideal.

A spiritual conversation takes place over three rounds. Each round has a time of silent reflection and then a time of sharing and listening.

There are two options for reflection. Participants may spend time with the passage of Scripture, or on the definition of viable parishes, provided at the top of this page. The Viable dimension of the *Take the Way of the Gospel Framework* is not just about having the resources to be sustainable, it's about what we do with those resources and what we prioritise together.

The opening and closing prayers are also featured in the participant's guide and can be read together.

Further viewing

A video explaining the steps of a Spiritual Conversation by Fr Robin Koning SJ:
<https://bit.ly/ListentotheSpirit>

1. Begin in prayer

Come Holy Spirit
Fill the hearts of your faithful
and enkindle in us the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created
and you shall renew the face of the earth.

Amen.

2. Spiritual Conversations

ROUND ONE

Reflection

Take time to read the scripture or definition,
for reflection.

Matthew 6: 19-21

Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and woodworm destroy and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworm destroys and thieves do not break in and steal. **For where your treasure is, there will your heart be too.**

Consider this:

- What words or phrases are you drawn to and why?

We will spend 10 minutes in quiet reflection.

Sharing and listening

Take 2-3 minutes to share aloud with the group the fruits of your personal reflection, guided by the above question. You may like to begin by saying:

- In my reflection today ...
- I feel ...

Anyone in the group can begin, and you may continue clockwise or allow people to share in the order they are comfortable, until each person has had their turn.

When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart. This is a time of active listening and intentional speaking. There should be no crosstalk during any of these rounds.

ROUND TWO

Reflection

Sit again in silence for 5 minutes. Consider:

- What resonated, challenged, surprised, or struck you in the sharing you just heard?
- How do you feel?

Sharing and listening

Take 2-3 minutes to share with the group from their reflection. This time, nothing new is to be added, just their response to what was shared.

You may like to start by saying:

- I have heard ...
- It leaves me feeling ...

ROUND THREE

Reflection

Sit again in silence for 5 minutes. Think about how you are feeling and about your experience of the prayer and listening today.

Ask:

- Was there a common theme emerging?
- Might the Holy Spirit be encouraging, enlightening, or calling you in some way?

Sharing and listening

This time of sharing is open and less structured. People may share as freely as they please. The purpose of this time is to deepen the conversation and our encounter with each other. During this time, remember to listen deeply when someone else is speaking, and to respond to the conversation with an open and kind heart.

Take some time to discern together any common themes, words, or ideas arising in your sharing around the Viable parish prompts.

If you have broken into smaller groups, come back to the larger group and collect any wisdom – themes, words or phrases – that may be useful to inform the future direction and plans for your parish as you seek to grow the viability of your community.

3. Concluding prayer

Pray a short spontaneous prayer of thanks.

All: Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning,
is now and ever shall be
world without end. Amen.