



LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT

# Growing Vital Parishes

**Vital parishes** read the signs of the times with hope and missionary vision. They understand their local neighbourhoods, culture, and history. Having been shaped by the past, they are nevertheless filled with hope for their future.

This may involve openness to new ideas, acknowledging that past methods no longer fit where God is calling the parish today. They have clear direction, purpose, and collaborate effectively with others to further the kingdom of God.

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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 vital parishes, provided at the top of this page. The Vital dimension of the *Take the Way of the Gospel Framework* is all about renewing our missionary vision, improving the excellence of our leadership, and recognising the many gifts in others, both lay and ordained, that can contribute to an outward-facing vision.

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.

#### The Great Commission (Matt 28: 16-20)

Now the eleven disciples set out for Galilee,  
to the mountain to which Jesus had directed  
them. When they saw him they worshipped  
him, though some hesitated. Jesus came  
up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority  
in heaven and on earth has been given to  
me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all  
nations; baptise them in the name of the  
Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
and teach them to observe everything I have  
commanded you. And look, I am with you  
always till the end of time.

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 Vital 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 vitality 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.