

'Encountering the Spirit'

Lent Resource: An Introduction

'Encountering the Spirit' is offered to encourage and enable the continuation of "spiritual conversations" begun during the parish listening phase of the diocesan synodal process, of listening to the Holy Spirit in our lives, through Scripture, and in discerning the way forward together. This resource is available for a variety of settings: as an existing small community groups, a newly formed synodal gatherings/groups, as a parish community and at home.

It is presented as a downloadable, simple double-sided A4 sheet which is easy to print off. If required, large print copies could easily be printed off onto A3, enlarging the print size by 143%. Please feel able to adapt to your local circumstance.

Structure of each session

As a rough guide each prayer time may last up to 90 minutes, allowing sufficient time for silent prayer and sharing. It can be delivered either in-person, or online.

Facilitating a Session

Some of you will already be familiar with facilitating a small community, or similar faith sharing sessions, whilst for others this may be new. To assist you the guide below is designed to support you and includes the familiar elements of "spiritual listening".

Gathering as a small community to share prayer, life and faith is an important part of parish life. This is a sacred time. It is important that you take the time to get to know one another, so always make room for the introductions of anyone new, and to ask one another how you are and what has happened since you last met.

Hospitality and environment are very important: meet in a reflective atmosphere. You might find it helpful to have a focal point, such as an open Bible, a candle, or similar display. A reflective atmosphere without distractions is best. Combined this helps build an atmosphere of intimacy and welcome, where people feel comfortable to share respectfully. This helps them to take seriously what happens within them as they listen to others and speak. Ultimately, this interior attentiveness makes us more aware of the presence and participation of the Holy Spirit in the process of sharing and discernment of how to respond (action).

Timing is important. The suggested time for each session is 90 minutes. Each session has a balance of prayer, sharing experience, encountering scripture, a reflection and talking about how we are living our faith.



STRUCTURE OF THE MEETING

- Opening prayer and quote from the Synodal process; the opportunity for review (after week 1);
- Scripture (one of the five Lent Gospels (Year C) & a reflection;
- Silent prayer;
- Question to facilitate sharing;
- Point for Action;
- Closing prayer.

PRAYER it is good to time for reflection after the scripture and reflection. We suggest 10-15 minutes.

EXPERIENCE is essential to our spiritual life. As you share ensure that each person who wants to talk is given the opportunity. No one needs to talk unless they want to, and importantly no one person should dominate the conversation.

SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION – is active listening & speaking from the heart. It is deep listening to the other person and to God. The goal is to try and understand others as they are. The fundamental question is: "What is happening in the other person and in me, and how is the Lord working here?" Listen not only to what is said but also to what the speaker means and what he or she might be experiencing at a deeper level – thus LISTENING ACTIVELY with the heart.

Active listening means:

- We pay attention and show this by how we look;
- We allow ourselves to be influenced and learn from the other;
- We listen to what is being said, not focussing on what you will say afterwards;
- We welcome the speaker without judgment – each person is the expert on his or her own life;
- We grow in an awareness that the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the other person.

This requires humility, openness, patience, and involvement

Speaking from the heart means sincerely expressing oneself, one's experience, one's sentiments and thoughts.

- Speaking from the heart is offering a generous gift to the other, in return for being actively listened to;
- It involves speaking about one's own experience and what one truly thinks and feels;
- We take responsibility not only for what we say, but also for what we feel. We do not blame others for what we feel;
- Share the truth as we see it and as we live it, but do not impose it.

ACTION/RESPOND Each week we have the opportunity to respond. It may be a good time to assess our priorities and see how we are living our faith in the totality of our lives: in our families, in our relationships, in our work. We may not need to do more; we may need to do less. This is the time to look at how we are living the values of Jesus and perhaps to identify new behaviours and attitudes.

Scriptures taken from The Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday and Company Ltd