

# GUIDELINES FOR LISTENING CONVERSATIONS

Teach me to listen, O God, to myself.  
Help me to be less afraid to trust the voice inside —in the deepest part of me.  
Teach me to listen, Holy Spirit, for your voice —in busyness and in boredom, in certainty and doubt, in noise and in silence.  
Teach me, Lord, to listen.

Teach me to listen, O God, to those nearest me, my family, my friends, my co-workers.  
Help me to be aware that no matter what words I hear, the message is:  
“Accept the person I am. Listen to me.”  
Teach me to listen, my caring God, to those far from me—the whisper of the hopeless, the plea of the forgotten, the cry of the anguished. Amen  
*John Veltri S.J.*

## Purpose of the Listening Conversations

By simply listening and attending without discussion and debate, we may deepen our awareness of how contemplative listening may genuinely ‘hear a person’ and lay the foundations for hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The one who shares may experience that speaking from the heart into such a receptive listening helps to honour and own what has been articulated however haltingly.

## The Group Session

- The use of the ‘**talking piece**’\* – only the person holding the talking piece is allowed to speak. The first person to speak will then pass on the talking piece in a clockwise direction.
- Each person shares, in turn, from his or her own experience of the personal reflection material without theorising.
- Each other group member honours what is shared by receiving it in silence and without comment.
- After each person’s sharing, a brief time of silence can be helpful.
- Another person shares.

*\* Any small object that can be easily passed on and held in the hand as someone speaks.*

This procedure is repeated until every group member has spoken, once only.  
The round of listening has finished when each person has shared.  
The group is responsible for ensuring that each person has time to share.  
Each person accepts responsibility for the depth and detail of his/her own sharing.

**Confidentiality:** Nothing said in the group by way of personal disclosure may be raised at any point outside the group except by the person who said it.

## THE FOUR INTENTIONS

### i) SPEAK FROM THE HEART

Seek the voice that emerges from the centre of your chest region – right where our physical heart resides - rather than the mouth. The heart truly is an organ of spiritual perception, by which we can “see” by feeling. The more you recognise the vibrations of Heart, the wider your field of perception will be.

Speaking from the heart doesn't necessarily mean “saying something nice!” Being ‘loving’ and being ‘lovey-dovey’ is not the same thing.

- The practice is dropping into a place of ‘knowing’ in this moment...what is the ‘truth’ of the moment...*whatever* that is.
- To ‘speak from the heart’ is another way of saying ‘to name what is present.’
- Using “I” language. “We” is not agreed or to be presumed.
- No generalisations.

### ii) LISTEN FROM THE HEART

As rare as speaking from the heart may be in our ordinary lives, *attentive listening* is probably even rarer! Respect the right of others to express their opinions and feelings, regardless of my reaction to them. Another way to say it is to ‘listen to what is present,’ and conflict can sometimes be present.

The success of our becoming a body, especially the Body of Christ, is largely determined by the quality of listening to one another. So take the risk of listening.

Imagine that your heart has ears. Having judgements at the mind level is inevitable, it goes on all the time...but not to react, just receive. “Thank you for speaking from the heart, for sharing who you are.” **We simply receive, without comment or debate.**

### iii) BE LEAN OF EXPRESSION

This is a practical consideration – everyone should receive his or her fair share of our attention. To express ourselves in a ‘lean’ way is to pay attention to this. Avoid the attempt to control or ‘fix’ the issues of others.

### iv) BE SPONTANEOUS

Try & have the intention not to rehearse what you're going to say.

Preparing what you're going to say as the talking piece gets closer limits the ability to listen attentively. So it's not about bringing a prepared speech! Does the impulse to speak *serve*? Can I tune in to ‘where is my ego?’ ‘Where is the service?’

## THE WITNESS CIRCLE

A further round, where people can randomly pick up the talking piece and reflect back something that was said in the previous rounds that resonated deeply with them. In this way the fruit of the deeper listening process can be harvested.

*(Adapted from Llysfasi Spirituality Workshop & ‘The Way of Council’)*