

Sisters of the Living Word Process for Sacred Conversations

(Marie McKenna, SLW)

Process each morning of Assembly.

Pre-Assembly:

- A few sisters prepare reflective writings with specific themes pertaining to the work of the Assembly. These are spiritual reflections not business items.
- Brief reflection papers are sent to the community with the invitation to prepare for our “Sacred Conversation” time.
- The sisters that prepare the reflective writings also prepare short (5min) reflections after morning prayer of assembly. Goal to “prime the pump” for sharing.
- Assign table facilitators for groups of 6-8 sisters Send instructions to facilitators.
- Divide sisters into groups. Note: keep same groups throughout assembly in order to have opportunity for deeper sharing.
- Set up groups of 6-8 people where groups won't be close together. Have small table, cloth and candle.
- Suggested time 1.25 hours (time is taken to get into groups and to come back into assembly room)

Assembly:

- Morning Prayer – more meditative.
- Short Reflection by Sacred conversation preparers.
- The first day: Short introduction to Sacred Conversations including ground rules about confidentiality . We are free to share what we say in a group to others but we aren't to share what other sisters say in a group.
- Give instructions as to process during sharing – when sisters are ready to speak they take the candle from the table and place it back when finished.
- Ring warning bell 5 min. before or have facilitator state when there is 5 minutes left. This is an opportunity to open conversation and summarize experience.
- Return to Assembly room.

INSTRUCTION TO FACILITATORS:

INSTRUCTION TO FACILITATORS:

- **Invite sisters into the sacred space** where there is an invitation to share with community members
- Give ground rules:
 - Note that sisters are invited to share what they can – and encourage sisters to risk sharing stories that are important to them.
 - What is said in the group stays in the group unless you share about yourself.
 - As much as possible clear your mind to pay attention to the sister sharing her story.

- No cross talk (asking questions, giving opinions) when another Sister is talking.
- Every sister will get a chance to share before there is open conversation.
- When everyone has had a chance to speak open conversation summarize the experience for you – consider areas you would like to pursue further, surprised you, disturbed you. Again, focus on your experience.
- Note there will be a 5 minute warning (suggestion: set a chime on your phone)
- End with a brief comment reflective of the moment to prepare to move into the Assembly room

Suggestion for Reflective Listening:

- Prepare in advance to listen to others in contemplative silence.
- Keep attention focused on the Sister sharing – try to not to be self focused.
- Listen with compassion
- Attempt to understand the meaning of what the Sister is conveying.
- Understand that our listening get's better when we practice.
- Remain curious about what is being said.
- We can't listen to other sisters when we are focused on ourselves. We miss the opportunity to encounter others.

SACRED CONVERSATIONS THE INVITATION TO TURN TO ONE ANOTHER

Margaret Wheatley:

“Conversation is the way we discover how to transform our world, together”

It is when we share with others what is important to us, what is meaningful, that we come to a sense of unity. Unity is often found in the deep recognition of diversity .

Margaret Wheatley suggests the following to have sacred conversations:

- We acknowledge one another as equals
- We try to stay curious about one another
- We recognize we need one another's help to become better listeners
- We slow down so we have time to think and reflect

(updated: January, 2023)

- We remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together
- We expect the conversation may be messy at times

What can get in the way?

We can close out what we don't want to hear because maybe we really don't want to change. We think we do, but our actions say otherwise. What to do then? Be patient, recognize the hesitation, automatic negative reaction, mark it down and reflect on it later. You can come back to it. Differences can also mask that our negative reaction is really about judgments. How can I tell? Notice if I'm pointing my finger (in my mind) at the other person (she says this because.....).

There is a danger that because we are engaged in 'sacred conversations' we keep things on the superficial spiritual realm fearing that underneath is messy and complicated/ God invites us as we are, not the false facade we wish to display. It's important to consider what is meaningful, what is the other person sharing that is meaningful to them. It's not about agreeing or disagreeing in these conversations.

A FEW TIPS

- Be Curious.
- Listen without judgments. What is the meaning of the sister's sharing?
- Share yourself - use I statements. Make it personal.
- Seek common ground.
- Listen for the values the other person is communicating.
- Be safe – risk in sharing but do so in a way that is safe for you. I often takes time to develop the skills to share our personal selves with others.

