Ignatian Encounter Ministry

Facilitator Tip Sheet

Dear Facilitator,

In facilitating Conversations in the Spirit, you create sacred, safe spaces for people to encounter one another and work collaboratively to discern the call of the Holy Spirit. Your role is critical to modeling a conversation that allows for deep listening, sharing and discernment and is inclusive and welcoming for all.

Role of the Small group facilitator

- **Welcome**. Create a welcoming and prayerful space
- **Script.** Follow the script to guide the conversation process
- **Guidelines**. Keep the conversation on track using ground rules
- **Timekeeping.** Be sure that each participant adheres to the time limit
- **Silence.** Observe times of prayerful silence between rounds
- **Notetaking**. In some cases, there may be a dedicated notetaker, if not, use the note-taking function in the break-out room to capture notes in the third round.

Some Expectations for Spiritual Conversations:

- **OWN Experiences**. The first round is a time to share one's own direct, personal experiences in the Church, particularly experiences of the heart and spirit—joys, affirmations, sorrows, and challenges.
- **Listening sessions**. In these sessions, we are listening with attentiveness and openness to others' experiences and stories, and we are allowing these stories to touch our hearts. We are not expected to solve any problems or defend positions.
- **Sacred spaces.** People are sharing the fruits of their prayer and aspects of their spiritual journeys. Participants are invited to enter this space with reverence and to be open to the presence of God in our midst.
- **Safe spaces.** Participants should know and trust that their words will be heard with respect, kept confidential, and not judged or criticized. Likewise, they will respect others, especially those who are particularly vulnerable or wounded.

- **Everyone is an expert in their own experience.**
- **Prayerful process.** It is hoped that all will have had time to pray on the key question before this session. If not, the facilitator may arrange for that before starting the conversation. Also, between the rounds of sharing, we encourage a couple of minutes of silent prayer to allow time to listen to any interior movements in one's heart and spirit.

It is **NOT** the place for:

- Debating, defending, or arguing
- Correcting others, feeling obliged to teach others, even if well-intentioned
- Counseling (Facilitators are not trained for this.)

Possible situations and ways to address them:

- **Exceeding Time Limits**. The biggest challenge in facilitating is keeping all participants to the pre-determined time limits. We strongly encourage you to track the time, so that there is time for everyone to speak and to complete the three rounds of sharing and final evaluation. You may want to establish a plan up front where you will say, "30 seconds left." Then say, "*Thank you, let's move to our next participant.*" Or, "*Sorry to have to interrupt you; your time is up. Thank you for your input, we need to move to our next participant so that everyone gets a chance to share*."
- **Interrupting**. If a participant interrupts a speaker or jumps in before others have had a turn, you might say, "*We ask you to hold your responses until each participant has had a turn. In the second round, you will have a chance to make your response*."
- **Non-experiential Inputs**. Despite having been told in the introduction to share their own personal experiences or feelings of joy, sorrow, disappointment, etc., some people may find this a difficult thing to do. Instead, they may express ideas, opinions, or judgments. In this case, you may decide to let them continue speaking so long as they are respectful of others; do be sure to keep them to the allotted time.
- **Pastoral Correction**. A participant may try to correct another participant or challenge them to debate an issue. In this case, gently interrupt this participant: "*I would like to acknowledge that you have a concern, but I want to remind you that this is a session for listening to one another's experiences with openness and respect. Each*

person is the expert of their own experience. It is not a place to judge, correct, or challenge another."

- **Strong emotion**. In general, a facilitator simply thanks each participant for sharing. It's important not to value one input more than another. However, if someone is very emotional, you might feel it is important to acknowledge that. You might say, "*Thank you for your sharing and for trusting our group here with your story*."
- **Upset**. If a participant is visibly upset, it would be important to acknowledge that. You might say, "*I can see this situation is upsetting for you. Since we won't be able to resolve this here, would you like to speak with me or the moderator after the session?*" Whether the response is yes or no, be sure to mention this situation afterward to the moderator who can follow up as necessary.