

REFLECTION

When we were asked to choose a project for our action research, I wondered what variations could take place in spiritual direction to make it more effective for 21st century directees. I felt that technology should have a role in present-day spiritual direction, so I chose to move away from a traditional model towards a broader concept of spiritual direction. Two major insights that strongly shaped my choosing to interweave spiritual direction, group dynamics, and cyber-technology into this action research are:

- 1) It is important in the 21st century to understand the power of small group collaboration in sharing spirituality. Small group collaboration not only builds communities and encourages branching out, but it is also affirms the perspective of various individuals, improves and stimulates ideas, and calls participants to be more responsible regarding what they say and do.
- 2) It is also important to realize that cyber technology is a significant part of everyday life for many persons today, so it became imperative for me to consider using online communication tools to accommodate directees living in this technological society. Using Wikispace, Groups, Google Doc, iMoive, Youtube, Voicethread, Skype, Facebook, Email, Adobe Acrobat and UpToUs have been effective in helping the directees to connect words (cognition) with valuable attention and true empathy. These tools have challenged them to go deeper in their own reflection and empathic listening in order to understand and empathize before they write their entries. I believe that this use of cyber-tools has helped my directees and me to become better spiritual thinkers and

responders, living in familiar places, but willing to notice what is unfamiliar and in need of attention.

Following the action research process provided me with a logical method to explore my questions and ideas. Using this method has been an excellent discipline, encouraging me to ask questions about my vision and to ground myself in research and background information, so that I could intelligently devise an appropriate action. I was presented with new learning theories that moved me forward in creative ways.

One of the influential theorists for this study has been Gordon Pask. His two theories of Conversation and Cybernetics confirmed the value of my including both face-to-face sessions and online experiences for eGroup-Spiritual Direction. I witnessed the results of his theories both in face-to-face sessions and in cyber communication activities by observing the directees' shifts in thinking as well as their sharing about alternative actions. Another conceptual framework that is significant in this research is the building and support of a community of practice (Wenger, 2009). The social learning process became a working reality as the directees and myself became mutual learners, and we shared deeply in online blogging as well as in face-to-face sessions. We each developed learning partnerships with all the other members of the group by listening, reflecting back a question and focusing on his/her answer; the directees constructed their identities within the learning circle. The concept of spiritual direction is that the directees must be the ones in charge of their own spiritual lives, and Wenger's theory enhanced the outcome of positive growth.

“Communities of practice create values by improving the performance of their members when they apply their knowledge in the performance of their job. Because practitioners belong at once to their communities of practice and to their work teams, they are the

direct "carriers" of knowledge. If a new solution is proposed in their community, they can apply it to their work. If they discover a new solution in their work, they can share it with their community. Such multi-membership avoids many of the hand-off problems that arise when specialists manage knowledge for others to apply. This is why it is important to have the practitioners themselves be in charge of managing their own knowledge, no matter how much assistance they receive in the process." (Wenger, 2009)

As a spiritual director, this transformative visioning allowed me to think outside of the box. The Holy Spirit invited me to tag along as she met the directees wherever they were and brought them to greater clarity, leading them at their own pace, time, and space to deeper faith and new life. There were times when I wished that I were one of the directees, and in many ways, I was one of the directees because we became a community of learners. I, therefore, had the opportunity to learn along with the group, to expand my own consciousness, and to become grateful for who I am and what I have. From the new model of eGroup-SpiritualDirection, directees were able to grasp basic concepts of spiritual direction through the use of various learning experiences and technological tools: through group sessions and online exchanges, directees could become closer to God by processing the movements of the spirit through both face-to-face and blogging activities.

By engaging with each other through online conversations and empathic listening, directees built upon and deepened their prior experiences of each face-to-face encounter. Empathic listening brought spiritual awakening that led to a place of transformation. Sharing the wisdom of the Holy Spirit was a freeing experience for the directees, and it also made them more secure in their faith. As the directees and I practiced sharing our awareness of God in our lives, each of us were more easily giving ourselves another

chance at new life, and then it became more natural and appropriate to reach out to others, and the outreach continues, like a vibrant circle. Together we grew in respect, honesty, depth, and confidence as we walked a new way in God's embrace.

My desire is to journey to God, and through this research, our eGroup-Spiritual Direction journeyed together in faith. I hope that I can be a bridge and encourage others to be bridges, connecting each other and assisting each other to move to more desirable places. If we can take small steps to build bridges for each other in very practical ways, we can have a beautiful pilgrimage on earth. Through this action research, I have found a pathway to lead both others and myself forward in faith. At eGroup-SpiritualDirection, we strive to act justly, to love tenderly, to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8) as we reach out to others in inclusive ways.

Not only did I learn a lot about spiritual direction, new ways of learning, and myself, but I also became aware of possibilities for expansion of my present vision/project, as well as opportunities for future research. I learned from email responses that there is still plenty of space for more research and action to improve, enhance, and expand the model. For example, a Buddhist person viewed my iMovie and responded by wanting to join a group. I am wondering if eGroup-SpiritualDirection can offer the same strength to persons of other faiths as it has done for a group of Christians who believe in the person of the Holy Spirit and who are tagging along with Jesus. Some questions that might guide my action research in future are:

- Should each group be composed of people from one faith or would it be possible to include group members with different faiths?

- If leading an interfaith-faith group, would the facilitator need to learn some concepts and vocabulary of different religions in order to provide an authentic eGroup-SpiritualDirection?

Another encounter pertaining to this project occurred when a youth-group leader approached me about creating more groups. This person is interested in applying the model of eGroup-SpiritualDirection with her young leaders. Our conversation prompted me to think about what my alternatives are to accommodate and facilitate more than one group at a time. As I continue to think about the future, I am contemplating a shift from the vision of being a good spiritual director for 21st century directees to the possibility of training and mentoring others to be facilitators.

- What would be the best strategies for the facilitator to schedule multiple groups of directees?
- Do facilitators need certain skills for different age groups of directees?
- Should I be training future facilitators, conducting groups of my own, or adjusting my time in order to do both activities?

Furthermore, one of the iMovie viewers emailed me that he does not see how he can fit into this format of spiritual growth, nor would he feel comfortable to share about his private life with others. The reception of this email affirmed the validity of my presupposition that eGroup-SpiritualDirection is not for everybody; it is basically designed to accommodate present-day middle-aged and young adults that are computer literate.

Prompted by the Spirit to begin eGroup-SpiritualDirection, and having gained some wisdom and confidence through the process of this action research, I extend my

invitation to the world of Spiritual Directors: Let us challenge ourselves to continued research, action, and openness. The desert fathers practiced and shared a form of spiritual direction, and the idea grew and changed over time. Modern-day spiritual directors continue to try to help persons to be more aware of God within them. My action research has taught me that there is room – and even need – for technology and communal sharing to be used in conjunction with other aspects of spiritual direction. Let us not be afraid of variety and diversity as we construct our spiritual direction programs with meaningful tools to enhance the faith journey of each culture and tradition.