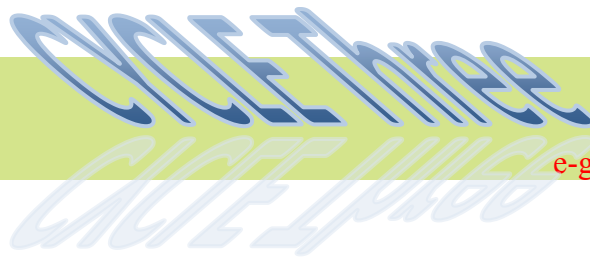




e-group spiritual direction

Maria Lai, CSJ

Action Research – Cycle III



e-group spiritual direction

## INTRODUCTION

During this time between Cycle Two and Cycle Three, e-group spiritual direction participants and leader were experiencing hope and new life. The small group face-to-face sessions have always been consistently significant experiences for all directees and myself. In Cycle Two, I focused on developing a technological tool to see whether the electronic component of this e-group spiritual direction model can be combined with the traditional face-to-face session, and whether it would be beneficial for the new candidates of e-group spiritual direction. In Cycle Three, I planned to conclude the action research by promoting eGroup-SpiritualDirection.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What action can I take to inform people about eGroup-SpiritualDirection?

How can I encourage people to join eGroup-SpiritualDirection?

## ACTION

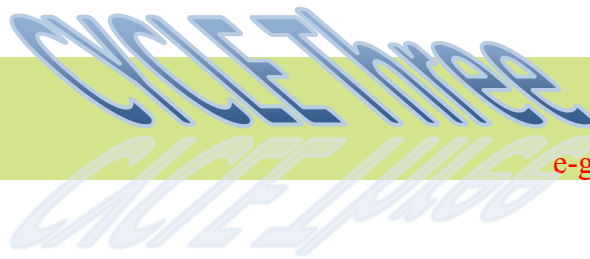
In class, we have been working on some “elevator speech exercises”/ short, direct, convincing presentations of less than two minutes. Learning and practicing these exercises encouraged me to discern the best way to communicate the joy and value of eGroup-SpiritualDirection to others. Realizing that not everybody has the time or interest to read the entire thirty pages of the Action Research and an “elevator speech” is very short, I came up with the idea of an iMovie to present the essential points of eGroup-SpiritualDirection for those who are interested in learning more about this action research.

### Part I

#### An iMovie

The purpose of this iMovie is to share what e-group spiritual direction is, so that people will taste the reality of the research. Through a form of short story telling, the Holy Spirit may attract and inspire some people who will desire and acquire more about this action research, and will ultimately be encouraged to join eGroup-SpiritualDirection.

We are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Collaboration is essential. In the process of making the iMovie, I invited a producer (Chris Irr) and a group of three candidates to join me on May 14, 2011. I wrote out a text for the producer to use in recording and taking photos of the



group. In addition, I invited three candidates for a sample face-to-face session in appreciation for their being in the iMovie for the Action Research website.

#### A Survey for the iMovie

I will then do a sample circulation of the iMovie and conduct a survey to learn whether the iMovie would speak effectively for eGroup-SpiritualDirection. (Please see Appendix II.)

### Part II

#### Survey for the validity of iMovie

This survey was distributed to ten people. Among them, there were five spiritual directors and five regular Catholic persons. The result from the survey reflected positively on what eGroup-SpiritualDirection is. 100% participants were able to recall the three major components of eGroup-SpiritualDirection: small group sharing, the use of online technology and several face-to-face meetings. EGroup-SpiritualDirection includes “a way of integrating technology and face-to-face sharing to enhance the person’s spiritual journey.” Survey participants were also able to notice that “the 60/40 split makes the most of blogging and personal sharing, to deepen a person’s awareness of God in their lives,” and it is a “small group” interactive experience that is led by the Spirit.

#### Purchase of a domain name

By purchasing a domain name, I was able to establish a simple website address which visitors can access for more information. I am hoping that if visitors decide to use keywords search, the domain name might also appear from the search engine for eGroup-SpiritualDirection.

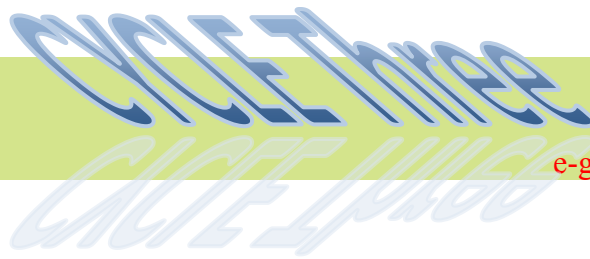
### REACTION TO THE CHANGE

#### Youtube and Facebook

After gathering the results from the survey, I decided to invite other people to visit the site. I first posted my iMovie on youtube and on facebook.

#### The Existing Website

The purpose of the Tagalong website has changed because it is no longer needed to store information nor to access it. During the past eight months, our website has been used to house material that I wanted to share with the directees, such as published articles



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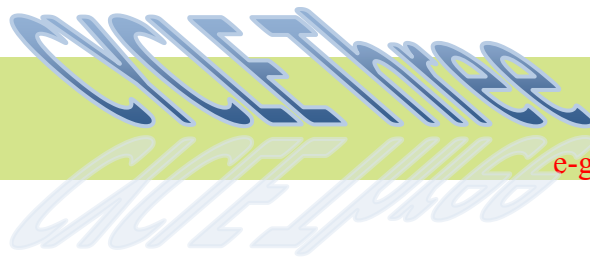
about growth in prayer and spirituality. In this Cycle, I will redesign the website to offer some basic knowledge of spiritual direction as well as some sample questions of the “Tag Along Face-to-Face session” at eGroup-SpiritualDirection to publicize the possibilities and advantages of participating in e-group spiritual direction.

<http://web.me.com/mlaicsj/Tagalonggang/Welcome.html>



### A Survey (Data Connection)

A survey with seven questions was produced and sent to all of the directees on May 17, 2011. The results show that those who responded (four out of six) had a positive experience with e-group spiritual direction. All respondents have made some decisions differently because of e-group spiritual direction; all respondents found that e-group spiritual direction assisted them to be more committed to their Christian living as believers; all respondents claimed that the face-to-face session helped them to recall some sacred moments with their God; and they all would recommend e-group spiritual direction to others. Eighty percent of the respondents found the weekly blogging exercise advanced their awareness of God’s presence in their lives. They thought that the exercise kept them disciplined and helped them to be more aware of God.



## EVIDENCE

In general, to develop our spiritual growth takes discipline and a lot of practice. Directees have been invited to share the depth of their hearts and their faith journey on their own by blogging each week. One evidence that this activity has been helpful is found on our working site “UpToUs.” Directees are getting very comfortable with each other. They initiate posting personal photos to share with others. The amount of times, the quality of sharing, and even sharing the hardship of not blogging have demonstrated a strong sense of their commitment to their own spiritual transformation.

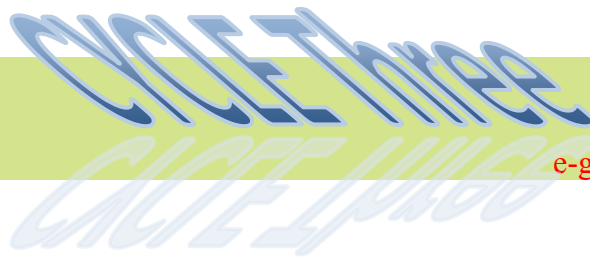
Although the amount of time participants have spent blogging has increased, the high quality of the blogs has remained intact. Directees are open and free, sharing about death, relationships, heaven, liturgical events, job places, their prayer life, discernments, health and other personal struggles. From the following two paragraphs, one can see how directees take the online session very seriously before they blog. The data from the evidence of the survey shows that even not blogging can be interpreted as growing “deeper than the surface level” of their spiritual lives.

### Examples from the Survey

One directee commented that even though she was not as faithful to the weekly blogging as she had hoped to be, she found the exercise very inspiring when other members shared their own tag-along moments. She thought the blogging was definitely a way to motivate her to see God in the day-to-day ordinary events. The face-to-face meetings had been helpful to her, and she had shared with the group that she had some personal problems; being in the group had helped her in taking time to discern what would be the most loving way to communicate with others rather than just reacting. Staying in contact with other directees may not seem difficult, but because everybody’s spiritual journey is deeper than on the surface level of sharing, she considered it more challenging to decide what was worthy of sharing on the blog. She was grateful that she could “tag along” with God and other directees in this spiritual journey until she was able to communicate some of the ways God was working in her.

Another directee shared how she sees the face-to-face session as “undoubtedly authentic.” She notices and states, “... the changes of facial expressions, tone of voice, shifting of bodily positions made me recall my own ‘squirmy’ experiences during troubled moments and then experiencing the hand of God reaching out and catching me as I am about to fall from a cliff of fear, doubt and despair and finally coming to grips with God’s creative and loving plan for me. Wow!”

An unexpected positive outcome came from producing the i-Movie.



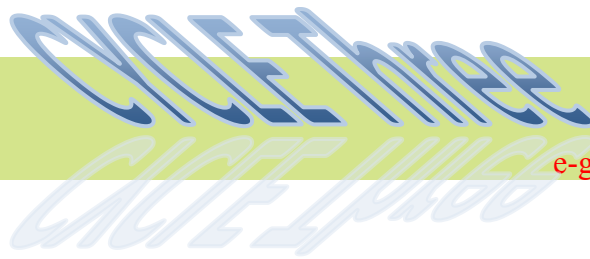
After the sample session with three of my candidates, all three candidates expressed that they had a positive experience with the face-to-face session. These candidates not only showed their interest in starting a group for themselves, but they also recommended such a group to others, whom they thought would be interested. Since May 14<sup>th</sup>, the date we did the i-Movie filming, two out of the three candidates have emailed me expressing further interest in e-group spiritual direction: One prospective directee wrote that she “could not wait to do the blogging”; another emailed asking for the e-group spiritual direction website.

Unexpected positive outcomes came from Youtube and Facebook.

One day after posting on Youtube, the marker showed 123 hits and a few responses from Facebook communication. Those who know me left messages on facebook or sent emails sharing their thoughts, providing evidence in the areas of the clarity and appropriateness of the iMovie, modern persons’ hunger for spiritual growth and direction, and the quality of the iMovie. Comments below are taken directly from the emails and facebook responses without any editing.

Clarity and appropriateness of the iMovie:

- Please allow me comment on the concept of 21<sup>st</sup> century eGroup-SpiritualDirection. Many key “success factors” to consider, and among them: (a) burning desire to improve on spiritual growth: “It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you go and bear fruit that will remain.” (John 15:16). (b) The model is 60% internet to fit busy schedule for spiritual foundation sharing, and 40% group sharing. Remember for maximum effect, evangelization must be a personal relationship such as the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9). “
- “ You did a fabulous job with this video clip. You were able to share the purpose of spiritual direction, the connections being made between the people in the group, the sensitivity of each person to every other person in the group, the depth of the sharing and the blessing that each person is receiving from their mutual sharing without ever breaking the confidentiality of the group. The presentation was ingenious and the invitation to avail oneself of this avenue of spiritual growth was compelling. You may have a greater response than you can handle.”
- “E-group spiritual direction is a wonderful way to experience God’s presence through the gift of one another as a listening presence on-line and in person. Caring individuals commit themselves to sharing the heart with a small group of spiritual companions on the journey.”



- "...how great that a small group would get together to share their spiritual journey. Each one in the group will surely be enriched by the sincere sharing with one another,..."
- "EGroup-SpiritualDirection is inviting more people into sacred experiences, sacred relationships, and sacred encounters that reminds us to stop and be present to the moment."
- "I think the intimacy of the group, of their sharing and of their hopes for personal and each other's best well-being comes through in a strong way in this video. This would be, for many, a wonderful and unanticipated way of growing in one's relationship with God, in one's sense of wholeness in their own selves and in their lives, and in their appreciation for the unique journeys others are in while on the same endeavor."
- "...made me realize even more, God's ever presence in each of us and in everything we do...and to have heard the same truth resonated by the priest in last Sunday's homily. I was ever more convinced then that God's presence makes every person I encounter, precious and worthy of respect."
- "...Oaky. I've seen it. I like the setting...the back drop behind the crucifix clearly says this is Christian. The eyes of each woman present speak as well as the words being shared...."

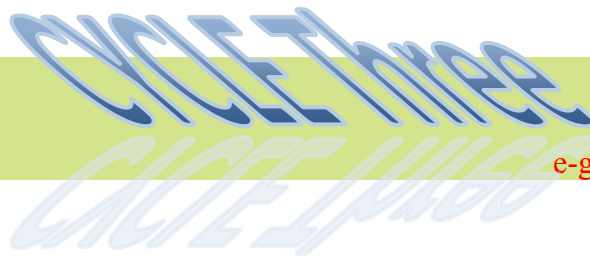
#### Modern Humanity's Hunger for Spiritual Growth and Direction:

- "Me! I wanna join! Can I promote this to my young-adults group? How do we sign up?"
- "Good. May I participate in this e-group?"
- "...I want you to know that I am in awe of what you are doing and I liked the presentation. I believe that this is the media that we need today to interact with many on their spiritual journey. I am happy that you are helping us do this [in our religious community]."
- "Wow, so much more powerful when it's visual! Is there any way to be able to just click on the website that is shown at the end?"

Some responses are from different Asian communities, including Asian Buddhist believers. This type of evidence seems to indicate that the model can be easily adapted and applied to a multi-cultural / interfaith group setting.

#### The Quality of the iMovie:

- "This is awesome! Great job!"
- "The video is really excellent. I hope you will be able to pursue this type of ministry...it can be so helpful for the right people...."



- "...I thought it was very good. It gave sufficient information to encourage me to want to learn more..."

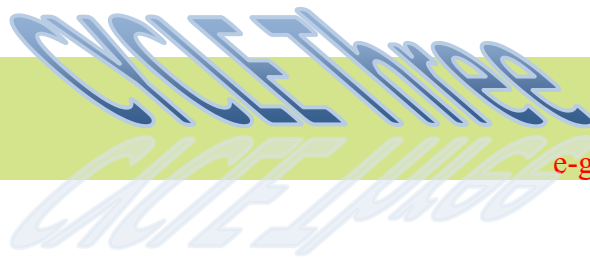
## REFLECTION

The Holy Spirit is really the driving force. As I have been sharing about e-group spiritual direction with other people, some have shown interest in acquiring more information; others have directly asked how they can join a group. It is because of their enthusiasm that I was inspired to write my "Elevator Pitch" and to go back to those people and ask them if they would like to be in my demo i-Movie. In return for their goodness, I gratuitously gave them a sample face-to-face session of e-group spiritual direction.

I am very delighted that the i-Movie gave me a wonderful opportunity to further advertise e-group spiritual direction in such a natural way. As I am writing my reflection now, I realize the blessing of having a mixture of cultures and subcultures represented in this action research. The existing group of directees is comprised of all highly competent single adults who have no families of their own. The group who experienced a sample face-to-face session is comprised of all settled adults who have children and extended families. Members of the first group have known me for at least six years, but I have interacted with the second group only twice. Both groups responded to the format / model of e-group spiritual direction very freely.

It is to my surprise that within these two groups, half of them are Asians. Usually Asians are more reserved and shy in sharing personal, sacred stories. I can only credit the Holy Spirit and the format / model of e-group spiritual direction as I witness these first generation Asians who are willing to share so deeply from their hearts.





e-group spiritual direction

## APPENDIX I

Survey Powered By Qualtrics®

Overall, did you have a positive experience with e-group spiritual direction?

Yes

No

Did the weekly blogging exercise advance your awareness of God's presence in your life?

Yes

No

Did the face-to-face session help you to recall some sacred moments with your God?

yes

No

Have you made any decisions differently because of e-group spiritual direction?

Yes, will share the detail below

No

Has e-group spiritual direction assisted you to be more committed to your Christian living as a believer?

Yes

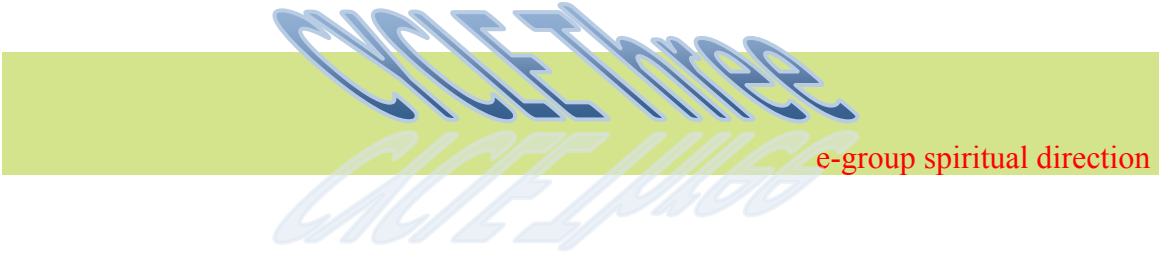
No

Would you recommend e-group spiritual direction to anybody?

Yes

No

Please feel free to make any comment, remark, and/or suggestion below:



APPENDIX II

Survey Powered By Qualtrics®

1. Would you please view this iMovie?
2. From your understanding of the iMovie, please describe in your own words what eGroup-SpiritualDirection is.

3. If you have any comments and suggestions, please feel free to share your thoughts below: