

INTRODUCTION

In order to increase the value of my action research and enhance the participation of the directees, Here in cycle two, I focus on some basic guidelines and opportunities to practice the online tool during the second face-to-face experience.

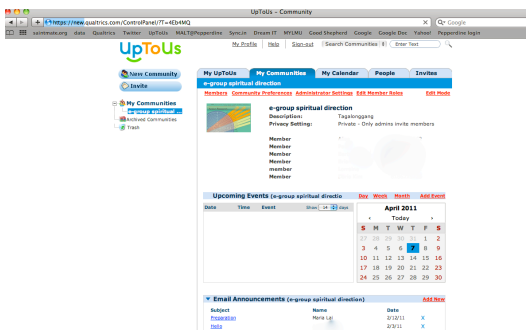
CYCLE TWO QUESTION

Would the participants increase their spiritual commitment if they increased their online participation through the use of UpToUs?

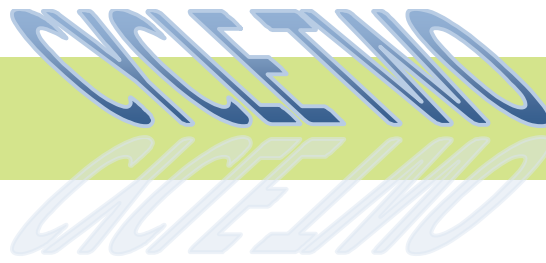
ACTION

Wikispace, Google Doc and UpToUs are all new tools that were recommended to me throughout the course. These tools are practical and easy to handle. Since I have become familiar with Wikispace and Google Doc, I want to continue learning and expand my competency in using UpToUs with my directees for e-group spiritual direction.

Prior to the second face-to-face session, which we had February 25-27, 2011, I created a new website, UpToUs, for participants to use with a Youtube tutorial. (Pease see the Appendix II)



I created opportunities during the session for participants to contribute suggestions for improving the structure of e-group spiritual direction. For example, we made a change regarding online posting of entries: Participants wanted to exchange email



once a week as a way to maintain and develop the relationship with each other. They also committed to writing a blog entry each week sharing how God is present in each of their lives through dreams or discernment.

REACTIONS TO THE CHANGE

As a group, we evaluated the structure: I asked the participants to share anything that they wanted to change (face-to-face and/or online features) in order for them to grow in knowledge of the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the e-group spiritual direction.

I am continuing Post-Evaluation by monitoring the quality of the face-to-face sessions as well as the efficiency of the online module.

My original face-to-face schedule changed because one of the members had to work and did not come at the last minute. One of the members also needed to leave after the second full day, and two members were sharing something serious after the second day of reflection, and they needed the time to share. My schedule changed to accommodate the five members of the group who remained when one member was unable to attend. The schedule also changed to provide the time for two directees who needed additional time to communicate with each other; therefore, the last day ended with two hours of clean up, and one hour for “Dream work,” and then abruptly adjourning.

EVIDENCE

The feedback on the consent form regarding sharing their insights was rewarding evidence of the value and need of such a program as e-group spiritual direction. The participants did not hesitate to offer permission to use their blogs and emails in order to improve the study. They even allowed me to tape the sessions.

I received feedback from three out of five participants, in the form of email and phone calls, reflecting the movement of the Holy Spirit during the weekend.

One way to see the participants’ commitment is from the Tagalong Website. On February 28th, the day after Face-to-Face II, the counter showed from 135 to 178 contacts. This number indicates an increase of 85% online website usage by the participants from the first quarter.



One of my goals was to create a space where directees could feel safe sharing sacred stories. At the conclusion of our first face-to-face session in August 2010, I created a website, and each participant chose a significant symbol to represent him/herself as a protection from outside observation and intrusion. Although all members of this group knew each other's symbol, individuals' anonymity was safe on the World Wide Web. Within the group, the symbols became touchstones for connecting with each other through prayer and thoughtfulness.

The participants shared that they thought of each other all the time because of their symbols. One said that not a day goes by that she does not think of everybody through his/ her symbols. They gave specific examples of how the symbols were connected to their daily living either at the supermarket (symbol: chocolate) or through the weather, nature and at the church (symbols: the moon, shamrock and the heart with the cross). Another one confirmed the value of the use of symbols by saying that she chose to do her term paper on "the moon" last semester.

Tagalong experience came at a perfect time for one participant. Because of unemployment during the past year, he found himself having more time to reflect at home with less anxiety and more peace. E-group spiritual direction helped him to be more aware of everyday things, such as "How God was trying to show me something and how much God cares about every single detail of my life that I had not paid attention to otherwise."

One participant realized that he was trying to discover more new ways to serve others – ways in which he would never have committed himself before joining Tagalong. He came to understand the power of the specific prayer called "laying on of hands" after he accepted the challenge to pray for others.

One expressed her awareness of God in different incidents of tagging along with God. She shared that she knew God was there when something unexpected happened. She said, "God is everywhere, ...". This specific participant gave an example: sharing that she went to cook for her friends one evening. Later, one member of this couple told her that after they went home from the meal and sharing, they were very happy, and the female partner became pregnant. This participant proclaimed that now she is totally tagging along with God and experiencing that God allows her to be an instrument for others – "It was just a miracle." Now every time when people use the term "tag along," her ears pop up.

One participant was very busy at work. Turning forty years old was hard for her; then she had an altercation with her mother. Additionally, she was stressed at work. She was, however, able to focus on the spirit of God from the people that she served at the youth retreat. The affirmation from the youth brought consolation and peace. She also recognized the presence of God in that event because she was able to be reconciled in a



relationship that had been damaged six years ago at the church. She claimed, “It was an amazing experience.”

One member indicated that she felt stuck at the same stage seeking God’s will for her future. With the tag along experience, she lived day by day. On the one hand, she woke up each day like a robot and at the same time she was asking herself why would God want her in this place at this time in life. She was not sure if she could be here with us for the Face-to-Face II because it was all depended on her father’s work. She did not know why she had not taken any classes during the winter session until her mother was rushed into the hospital and needed her at that specific time. She experienced God’s presence in all these events.

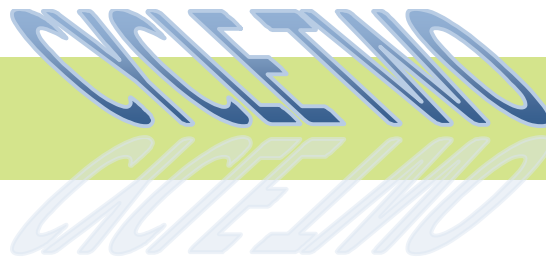
None of the participants had any clear expectations for Face-to-Face II; they expressed that they simply knew that they would meet God during this weekend. The directees are busy people, who chose to set priorities in order to participate in the second face-to-face session, clearly showing the commitment they have to their own growth in spirituality as well as the commitment they have to each other at e-group spiritual direction.

REFLECTION

One participant was not able to be present for Face-to-Face II because she was called for work at the last minute. She said she was disappointed to be absent. Other participants, however, texted her throughout the weekend. The absentee also made herself available to read all the blogs during her breaks and at the end of her workday. It was not possible to skype her during the sharing because she was working and unable to interact or give time for reflection and prayer regarding the material. However, we did the best we could to include her given the circumstances.

Cycle II affirms that face-to-face group spiritual direction session have success over time: the sessions are not just “quick fixes” or emotional highs. From the first to the second face-to-face session, directees were being formed to recognize God’s love and promises. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they developed a stronger foundation for valuing God’s presence and a discerning heart. Directees seem to be more committed to accept the invitations from God whether that involves courage to communicate openly and honestly about difficult subjects in their personal lives or whether it means accepting new challenges to serve outside their comfort zones. Growing in openness toward the Holy Spirit is the essential purpose of e-group spiritual direction.

Projection for Cycle Three:



The process and success of Cycle Two not only inspires me to cultivate and conduct an applicable step for my Cycle Three, but it also encourages me to continue using learning technologies to accomplish my action research. I now have the intention of sharing my practical format and learning experiences with other spiritual directors who may be searching for something between a face-to-face and online model. I think that it would be beneficial to create an i-movie or keynote presentation demonstrating the interconnectedness of the two components of e-group spiritual direction along with my own sacred story. In this way, other spiritual directors may be able to capture the power and the movement of the Holy Spirit rather than simply attempting to mimic the fruits from the sessions and missing the point of transformation within each heart.

The purpose of our Tagalong website has changed because it is no longer needed to store information nor to access it. The past eight months, our website has been used to house material that I wanted to share with the directees, such as published articles about growth in prayer, and spirituality as well as understanding and appropriate use of spiritual direction. I now intend to reconstruct the website to explain e-group spiritual direction and to publicize its possibilities and advantages.

Appendix I

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY ACTION RESEARCH: E-GROUP SPIRITUAL DIRECTION PARTICIPANTS CONSENT FORM

This action research is conducted by Maria Lai as part of the requirements for the M .A. degree in Learning Technologies. This project is designed to create a small group spiritual direction program including an online component as well as the traditional face-to-face meetings.

This action research creates a spiritual direction program which is 60% online and 40% face-to-face meetings with online taking place through forum discussions and personal blogs. In this program, you will be invited to attend the first face-to-face session with a small group to help you to understand the format of the e-group spiritual direction. At that point you can decide if you want to accompany others and Maria Lai for this spiritual journey. You would then create your own symbol which you will use when you make entries in the online forum. The expectation is that you will visit the forums and post at least two entries a week. After this, the group will meet two to three times a year according to the desire of the group.

While there may be some emotional effects of sharing values and spiritual ideas with



other people, we anticipate minimal risk to any person. The group will be asked to keep any shared content confidential.

This action research has an evaluation component that measures the effectiveness of the way I have designed the experience. I will be interested in knowing how this experience works for you and whether you show a stronger commitment in your spiritual growth towards God and your neighbors. To help me assess changes, you will be invited to complete two surveys and participate with me in a personal interview. The results of the surveys and personal interview will be combined in order to protect individuals' identities and will be used to evaluate the study.

Any information that is collected in this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your written permission. The cumulative results will be described in the final report, but the names and identities of the participants will be protected.

If you have concerns about the action research project, or questions about the project you may contact my advisor, Dr. Margaret Riel at 760-618-1314, 6100 Center Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045 or me.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without a penalty. Likewise, the researcher may cancel this program at any time. Two copies of this letter are enclosed. Please sign and date both. Keep one copy for your files and return one copy to me.

Maria Lai, CSJ

February 24, 2011

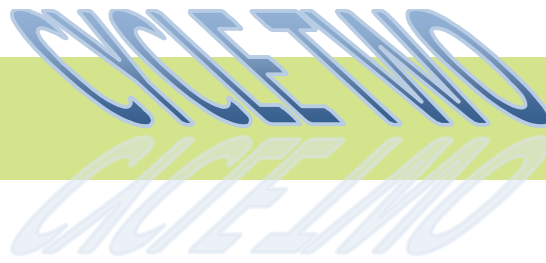
I have read the above and understand the conditions outlined for participation in this program of spiritual direction. I consent to the procedures that were described. I agree to participate in the study and allow the material from my blog, forum, interview and survey to be used for the purpose of the study without disclosing my identity.

_____ (Full Name)

_____ (Date)

_____ (Witness)

_____ (Date)



Appendix II

Face-to-Face II Schedule
Seal Beach
February 25, 2011 - February 27, 2011

DAY ONE

8:00pm Dinner

9:30pm Clean up and settle down

10:00pm Session I

Set up the computer program with internet access (getting ready for later)

Welcome new member as well as returning members

Check in

Re-introduce the format of e-group spiritual direction
Sign the consent paper

Theme – Discernment

How do we know God is reviewing His plan for us?

1. Recall “Tagalong” stories from your own personal history and experience the ways that God uniquely reveals Himself to each of us.
2. In discerning, be aware of similar feelings of God’s presence in your heart, in order to discover new information from God.

Assignment

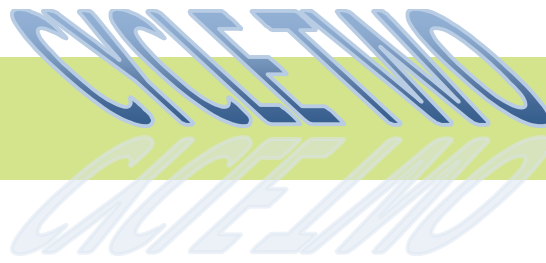
Pick a Bible story that matches your discernment.

12:00 midnight Adjourn

DAY TWO

10:15am Breakfast

11:15am Spiritual Direction Session (based on the assignment)



Discernment – The signs

Genesis 8:6-13, 20-22 (<http://www.usccb.org/nab/021611.shtml>)

- 1:50pm Lunch
- 3:30pm Private Prayer time
- 4:00pm Share on personal discernment with the personal scripture.
- 5:30pm Recall one highlight of the day and blog on UpToUS website
- 5:45pm Find a song that describes your discernment and post it on the website.
Invite all members of the group to listen to the song as a prayer for you during the week.
- 6:35pm Prayer: Laying-on of hands
(Because one of the participants must leave at 10 pm, we will conclude the first part of the session with this prayer rather than waiting until the end of the whole face-to-face session.)
- 7:30pm Agenda
Schedule the next face-to-face.
Make changes and improvements for e-group spiritual direction
- 8:00pm Dinner
- 10:30pm Game (bonding time)
- 1:00am Adjourn

DAY THREE

- 9:00am Breakfast
- 10:00am Clean up
- 10:15am Introduction to Dream work: Another way for God to communicate with us as we work on our discernments is to tap into our unconscious and subconscious modes.
- 12:30pm Closing prayer
- 1:00pm Adjourn