

Best Practices for Participating in an Online Faith Sharing Group

1. Before the scheduled meeting, I will take time to get in touch with where I am, and with what I deeply desire—from the prayer material and from the sharing. I hold that hope without forcing my expectation upon the others in the group. I come to the group open to hear about how God is at work in the lives of the others and with an eagerness to share how I am experiencing the hand of God at work in my own life.
2. When I enter into the online gatherings, I pray to remain in the present moment: being totally present to what is going on now, with the desire to listen attentively with not only my physical ears but also, with the ears of the heart.
3. I acknowledge that the dynamic of the group is not dependent upon the facilitator. She or he has simply accepted the responsibility to organize the agreed upon meeting times and then to serve as timekeeper—opening and closing each session. The spirit of the group is a shared responsibility among each of its members.
4. When it is my turn to share, I share in a way that is proper for the dynamic of an online group. I overcome the temptation to be either superficial or overly transparent. I strive to grow in my capacity to share so that I move beyond the first level while striving to speak at the third level of sharing:

Level One of Faith Sharing

Surface-level thoughts, feelings, and desires that relate to the prayer material

Level Two of Faith Sharing

Deeply rooted thoughts, feelings, and desires that relate to the prayer material

Level Three of Faith Sharing

Spiritual thoughts, feelings, and desires that affect my relationship with God that relate to the prayer material

What matters most in prayer, as heart to heart conversation with God, is that I am acknowledging and relating what I am carrying interiorly.

5. As the weeks move along, I pray for perseverance in prayer space; fidelity to the time agreed upon for the meetings and to my own personal prayer each day.
6. As I consider the movements of my heart during the weeks, I reflect upon *Spiritual Consolation*
 - a. How did I experience spiritual consolation these past days?
 - b. Can I share an experience of consolation with the group?
 - c. What were the fruits of the experience of consolation?
 - d. What was my sense of where God was leading through this experience?
7. As I consider the movements of my heart during the weeks, I reflect upon *Spiritual Desolation*
 - a. How did I experience spiritual desolation these past days?
 - b. Can I share an experience of desolation with the group?
 - c. What helped me resist the desolation? What wasn't helpful?
 - d. What did I learn through this experience?
8. Questions? Visit the our virtual retreat and virtual pilgrimage page on our website – <https://bc.edu/iajs> or contact us - iajs@bc.edu

Setting Up an Online Faith Sharing Group

We have found that small groups of about 6 people work best for an online faith sharing group. Many groups decide for themselves to meet on either a weekly or bi-weekly basis for no more than an hour. After setting an agreed upon time to meet, many of our retreatants use virtual platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet for their sharing sessions and have chosen a group member to host the online meeting with an alternative host in the event that person cannot make it. Please see the [Zoom](#) and [Google Meet](#) websites for more information on how to use their platforms.

The following are suggestions for online faith sharing:

1. Turn on the video function when possible and appropriate
2. Mute your microphone when not speaking
3. Be mindful of background noise and use a quiet location when possible
4. Avoid multi-tasking on your phone or computer
5. Monitor the “waiting room” to ensure that no participant is left behind should they be running late for the meeting

Fostering a Thriving Spirit

- God desires life for each beloved daughter and son.
- The purpose for each life is to be loved by God and then to learn how to respond to life in love
- God’s hand is always at work in each human life.
- God does not bring suffering and pain to beloved daughters and sons. Because of the freedom of creation, suffering and pain occur and God allows for this but works with each person in the pain and suffering to lead each beloved daughter and son to the healing and restoration God desires.
- The Paschal Path: the mystery of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—this paradigm is key to the understanding of human life.
- God can and should be imaged in countless ways—no image of God can adequately summarize the mystery of God in life.
- God often “appears” to us through the actions of human beings.
- Humans have been made good; they are malleable and ultimately responsible for their formation.
- God’s will for humanity is often revealed through the deepest and most sincere desires of the human heart. Ultimately, God’s will is our receiving unconditional love.

**Some Excerpts from *Praying the Truth*
William Barry, S.J.**

When people are honest with God about the shameful things in their past or present, they may sense that God breathes a sigh of relief. “Finally, you got that off your chest. Now we can move on. Thanks for the trust.” They may not hear it in these words, but in the sense of relief they themselves feel. They have let the cat out of the bag, and the sky has not fallen. They may also sense something like this from God: “I made you out of love; nothing you can do will change that love. You’re gradually getting the hang of who I really am.” We have been given back a bit of sanity (23).

Sanity, you see, consists in feeling in my bones that God loves me, warts and all, and that nothing I do will change God’s love for me. It is insane to feel that God’s love depends on me in any way. When I hesitate or refuse to tell God things that I consider shameful because I feel unworthy of God’s friendship, I am making myself the arbiter of who God is; God, in other words, is, for me, someone who does not like the kind of person I am. That really is insane, isn’t it? When we begin to feel God’s unconditional love and to trust it, we begin to believe in God, not in some idol of our own imagining. So, sanity, faith, and friendship with God go hand in hand, and they are abetted by truth telling (23).

Re: pettiness: He told God the truth: he was envious ... because they seemed to prosper while he did not. When he turned his pettiness into prayer, something positive happened; his focus shifted from himself to God. As a result, he came to some peace and, we presume, a change of his inner landscape. I have found that telling God the truth about such feelings and asking for help to move beyond them changes my focus from myself to God and, in the process, leads to inner transformation. By the grace of God, I become less envious, less petty, less full of self-pity.

Over and over again we discover that telling God the truth, no matter how unsavory that truth is, pulls us out of self-absorption and folly and moves us toward becoming the images of God we are created to be (52).

So that God may do the job of educating us to become mature sons and daughters, we need to let God into the bone and marrow of our being, into the messiness that characterizes our inner lives. We cooperate with God’s patient project by letting God in on all those aspects of our inner lives of which we are conscious. Trying to keep secret from God any aspect of ourselves—whether shameful or wonderful—hinders God’s dream of us becoming *like God*, through and through (108-109).

It has become clear to both of us that a certain way of remembering his past is not from God. When he remembers in this way, he is pulled toward self-loathing and despair; he forgets the love and forgiveness of God and wallows in his own misery. Mind you, when these bouts began, he had much to regret in his past ... But the ungodliness of this kind of remembering showed its hand by its relentless self-absorption and its frightening pull toward darkness and despair. God, who wants us to have life in abundance, could not be the source of such movements of spirit ... In the presence of God we recall our history of sin, not to wallow in guilt and self-loathing, but to repent, to turn ourselves away from self-destruction and toward a more abundant life. We ask God to help us recall our sins and our sinful patterns for the sake of transformation. The purpose of this godly kind of remembrance is not self-loathing but amendment. With this kind of remembrance, we ask God’s help to repent, to turn our lives around so that we are pointed in the right direction, toward the abundant life Jesus came to give us: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (113-115).