

eGroup-SpiritualDirection

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Introduction

It is so hard to find a place we can share things that are matters of our hearts without being judged. When I mentioned about my Action Research from Pepperdine University – the eGroup-SpiritualDirection – with someone that I knew, I got instant responses.

One person was captivated by the “e” (electronic) part. She said Internet access is very available for her. She loved the idea that she does not need to see others most of the time. She can be free to feel vulnerable as she shares her deep spirituality with others in a safe environment.

Another person just loved the idea that eGroup-SpiritualDirection is not about sharing our opinions of how we think of each other and/or each other’s action. Rather, eGroup-SpiritualDirection is a gift of our empathic listening. Guided by the Holy Spirit, participants listen to each other’s sacred story, and reflect on what they heard by asking a simple question. As a result, participants may be able to deepen their contemplation in prayer and be aware of the voice of their awesome God as they discern and commit themselves to their God.

Literature Review for EGroup-SpiritualDirection

Introduction

Spiritual Direction is a companioning experience on one's journey toward God. It implies a helping relationship that requires listening to another pilgrim whom God has created and loves (Hart, 1980), and it involves sharing one's awareness of God as well as God's action in one's life with another. An author and spiritual director who published numerous books as well as numerous booklets and articles, Alice Fryling (2009) defines spiritual direction as an interpersonal situation in which one person assists another to discover God ever-present in one's life and to grow in the spirit of faith, hope, love, and prayer. Spiritual direction supports persons through difficulties, sufferings, and trials as well as during times of joy. Fryling (2009) believes spiritual direction is a way to assist people to discern and respond to the motions from God by using conversations to enable the directee to understand, objectify and articulate his or her own living of faith, hope and love (Fryling, 2009). It is important to find a director with whom you are comfortable as you seek God's Spirit in the midst of a busy life. This director (companion) should be someone who can keep your word of life sacred, and offer spiritual companionship without judging your behavior – one who hears your truth with love. Spiritual companions break open the bread of their lives; serving with love and being themselves with all the humanness and struggle this implies (Hart, 1980). Through conversation and empathetic listening, both directee and director are able to discover the Spirit of God in their lives. "Spiritual direction is the contemplative practice of helping another person or

group to awaken to the mystery called God in all of life, and to respond to that discovery in a growing relationship of freedom and commitment” (Keegan, n.d., para. 3).

The most typical encounter for spiritual direction is the face-to-face private session. A directee can contact his or her pastor or confessor to share regarding the spiritual journey, or the directee can find an appropriate spiritual director and negotiate a schedule. However, “spiritual directors are not easy to find. Even when there are several priests at hand, this does not mean that they are all suitable as directors” (Merton, 1960). Group spiritual direction is also a possibility, but it is a less popular practice of this helping profession. Sean McCarty (Wicks, 2000) cites several positive comments regarding group spiritual direction in his study, stating that group spiritual direction can accommodate a greater number of directees as well as provide for more appropriate development of the sense that true Christian holiness has a communal dimension. Additionally, group spiritual direction can be a benefit and a source of support for directees as they hear the stories of others’ faith journeys and realize that they are not alone in their desire to draw closer to God. Groups of directees can grow in deeper appreciation for spiritualities and prayer styles other than their own. Nevertheless, there are difficulties with group spiritual direction. Objections indicate that group spiritual direction, even with small groups, could appear to be less personal. Additionally, directees might experience difficulty to trust and to open their hearts in front of a group of people. In some cases, there could be competition among directees as well as confusion caused by conflicting comments from other directees (Wicks, 2000). Devoting adequate time to each member of the group is a significant factor in planning group spiritual direction. One small spiritual direction group, containing five members and one

director was limited to a one-hour meeting. The small group meeting was scheduled so tightly, minute-by-minute, that there was very little flexibility for the Spirit to move among the directees (Fryling, 2009). It is no wonder that tension and frustration occurred.

History and Development of Spiritual Direction

Spiritual Direction is not new. It has existed since ancient times, however sometimes with different names and titles. Spiritual Direction has been called mentoring, personal guidance, and pastoral counseling. Individuals seeking spiritual guidance or direction would find a person, who would commit himself or herself to journey with the other as a spiritual guide (spiritual accompanist) to help the directee discover God's presence and ways. Aristotle (384 to 322 BC) wrote to Nicomachus, mentioning that he was capable of attaining a master's direction for living a virtuous life and of applying some sense of duty but he needed to find the right person for guidance (LaCoste, 2004). In this early time, people had already learned that a spiritual guide could lead to good results. Later, the fathers of the Church adopted the concept of spiritual direction as an essential pastoral duty. In 354 AD, Augustine responded by writing to Paulinus of Nola and his wife Theresia, who were experiencing difficulties regarding how to conduct themselves in society, "Talk about it to some doctor of the heart (*cum cordis medico*) who is compassionate" (PL 33, 355) (LaCoste, 2004). By the fourth and fifth centuries, many persons were seeking spiritual direction from the desert fathers and mothers.

The development and spread of monastic life provided an ideal place for the growth of spiritual direction, and this practice of assisting in discovering God and God's

ways remained a significant feature within the monastic tradition. “By the 6th century this highly individualized charism had undergone many changes.... As the centuries passed, more active, non-monastic types of direction came into being, fluctuating between individualized and institutionalized models in tune with developing theologies of grace and of what it meant to do God’s will” (Gratton, 1993). Later, Ignatius of Loyola developed the spiritual exercises as a contribution to guiding and enriching the quality of spiritual direction during retreat (Houdek, 1996). In the twenty-first century, directors and directees are challenged to realize the interconnectedness of all creatures:

No longer able to live a spirituality that sets them apart from their world and other persons in an isolated realm of mere interiority, contemporary seekers tend to view themselves as always in relation to, as inextricably connected with, the lived realities of their world.... Direction now involves not only one’s relationship to the Sacred Otherness that underlies and upholds life; it is also concerned about one’s openness to the environing universe and to cultural and social contexts. It questions us on issues of global justice and peace as well as on our response to immediate commitments embodied in family, work, and civic responsibility (Gratton, 1993).

Distinguishing Spiritual Direction from Other Forms of Spiritual Service

Spiritual direction continues to be a special helping activity, through which persons assist each other to discover God’s action already happening within themselves. The directee experiences the promise of the Holy Spirit as the director acts as companion and guide. The basic attitude of this helping profession is to know that God is always with us as the director and the directee focus on the movement toward union with God. When the directee reaches the stage of surrendering to God, letting go of whatever might be blocking the relationship between herself or himself and God, there would be awakening and conversion (Merton, 1960). Spiritual direction should not be confused

with psychotherapy or pastoral counseling, which are also respectable helping professions.

Whereas the aim of spiritual direction is to discover the action of God in one's life, the aim of psychotherapy is to cure or heal the patient who is experiencing pain. The healer or doctor seeks to find ways to alleviate the pain and cure the malady. The basic attitude of this healthcare profession is for the healer or doctor to assist the patient toward self-acceptance and to enable him or her to function in society. When the doctor applies professional techniques with specific results, the patient may be healed, and the behavior may change. Psychotherapy can be a long term or temporary service for those who need it (May, 1992). The purpose of pastoral counseling is to assist people with current problems. It is focused on intervention and healing in a Christian environment. People who seek pastoral counseling are experiencing some problem in life and they hope to get help from a professional person (teacher, counselor, priest, etc.), who will advise them and help them solve their problem. Generally, clients who seek pastoral counseling, do so in an effort to find what triggers the onset of their problems, pinpoint the source, and work toward solving the behavioral issues. A pastoral counselor frequently suggests additional resources, such as meetings or workshops to attend. Pastoral counseling usually is less than ten sessions and typically consists of one to three sessions (Stone, 1994). The basic attitude of this helping profession is to provide solutions for the immediate problems and assist clients to make changes to better their current situations (Atairs, 2000). For further comparison of these three helping professions, please see Appendices A and B.

Rather than attempting to cure people or to fix their problems, spiritual direction is simply offering each other the gift of empathetic listening. It is more of an on-going discovery of growing faith. Spiritual direction is a time to reflect and pause for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who leads us to an authentic life worthy of God. Spiritual direction is geared toward growing in faith, and it focuses on the life of the whole person, emphasizing self-knowledge and detachment from one's own ego in order to be free to find the will of God through the guidance of the Spirit of God (Houdek, 1996). "The whole purpose of spiritual direction is to penetrate beneath the surface of a [person's] life, to get behind the façade of conventional gestures and attitudes which he presents to the world, and to bring out his inner spiritual freedom, his inmost truth, which is what we call the likeness of Christ in our soul...." (Merton, 1960).

Using the Internet for Small Spiritual Direction Groups

In *Digital Habitats*, Wenger points out how technology and a small group community can be complementary to each other (Wenger, E., White, N., & Smith, J. D., 2009). His social learning theory has been a great support to the new idea of using the Internet for small spiritual direction groups. Wenger claims that "community of practice" is not defined by the location; rather, it is defined by the prospective of learning together (Wenger, E., White, N., & Smith, J. D., 2009). I have blended an online model with some engagement in face-to-face sessions, hoping to create authentic meaning, identity, and growth within the small group rather than simply relying on the spiritual director for input.

This literature review continues with research information directed toward utilizing cyber technology to provide spiritual direction to small groups of compatible individuals. In an effort to meet the spiritual needs of contemporary persons who are seeking companionship on their journey toward a closer relationship with God and are comfortable with both technology and group activity, a group spiritual direction program using the internet seems to be appropriate. The purpose of this e-group spiritual direction project is to use the modern attitudes of team work and group activity and to integrate aspects of electronic technology into the concept and practice of spiritual direction. E-group Spiritual Direction will not necessarily be appropriate for everyone, but it may be extremely helpful and comfortable for persons described by Webb: "...People don't go to church to feel spiritual anymore. They go to church to feel bored. But they keep going every week just out of habit..." (Webb, 2005). Many people feel that their churches simply do not meet their needs, desires and hopes even though they have a strong spiritual hunger. Webb feels that many churches are unable or unwilling to recognize the spiritual hunger and needs of their people; instead they continue to provide boring, outdated programs to explain theology without creating a different source of fellowship to encourage their believers to ask questions and express their doubts. There needs to be something more to fill the gap for alienated contemporary spiritual seekers (Webb, 2005). Small compatible spiritual e-groups can sometimes be the answer.

Most people naturally yearn to belong and to make connections for deeper relationships. The trend of establishing small groups based on shared values or lifestyles has been successful in today's society. The idea of small groups focused on nurturing souls and deepening relationships within Christian community living seems to be a

worthwhile setting for spiritual direction. Strength within these small groups has been found in the dynamic of persons gathering together to experience God and deepen relationship with each other (Webb, 2005). These small groups were most successful when they were following the mutual journey of discovering God's work in their own lives. On the other hand, small groups tended to fail when they focused heavily on gaining intellectual knowledge and understanding as well as sacrificing for a goal. Ideally, small group interaction should be a place where people may drop their masks of performance and perfection – a place for people to be who they truly are and where they can express their deepest desires and dreams, believing that Christ will fulfill them (Webb, 2005). Technology is a way for people to talk and to bond, and technology has been used successfully in the areas of religion and spirituality.

There are a number of experts and scholars promoting technology in the world of spirituality. The Pew Foundation's Internet and American Life Project found that 64% of the nation's 128 million internet users have used the network for religious purposes. Bruce's studies of televangelism estimated that the most popular shows had an average audience of about 8 million, and that in a typical month at least 34 million different households watched at least one show geared to religious information and experiences. Email, the worldwide web, and power point productions are also frequently used for religious purposes (Wyche, Hayes, Harvel, Grinter, R. E., & CONFERENCE. (January 01, 2006). We learn from this study that many people felt more connected to the pastor personally via the internet than they did sitting somewhat anonymously in the churches. *Technology in Spiritual Formation: An Exploratory Study of Computer Mediated Religious Communications* shows that recent use of technology in religious and spiritual

settings are in three general areas: education, preaching, and pastoral care. (Wyche, Hayes, Harvel, & Grinter, R. E., 2006). Technology in a religious and spiritual setting has been used to assist the needy. Church websites often support gift giving to help the affected areas. In one interview during Hurricane Katrina, the pastor of a small church described an upcoming trip to a nearby affected state to help victims. He described how he emailed his congregation with a request for items to give to the displaced families. “Email [was] sent to the whole congregation ... and on that email I said, ‘I am leaving to Mississippi either Thursday or Friday of this week...I have got to have diapers.’” The people responded generously and quickly (Wyche, Hayes, Harvel, & Grinter, R. E., 2006). This use of technology has been positive; it has saved human-power at the same time that it has benefited many people because the communications were one-to-many. The cyber world can also be used effectively for spiritual direction.

One of the major concerns that has hindered spiritual directors from moving toward technology forms of spiritual direction has been their belief in the importance of observing the body language of their directees as they listen to their sacred stories, but such observation and interaction can now be accomplished through developing technology. Studies have also shown that internet-based communities are seen as new social spaces enabling human interaction in the digital world. Campbell found that for certain people, personal online context had created greater intimacy and value than the time spent in more traditional religious settings (Campbell, 2005).

John Roberto, the president and founder of Lifelong Faith Associates conducted an extensive study asking what Christian faith would look like in 2020 and how to begin to prepare to meet the spiritual needs of the people. This group reported that many people

were hungry for God and the spiritual life but did not always feel satisfied with what they received from the organized churches. Theologians had a sense of urgency, feeling that they needed to come up with a variety of approaches to meet the diversity they were observing. One of the goals was to encourage young people to claim their own religious identities through online learning, including pod-casts, audio and video communications as well as printed resources (Roberto, 2008).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this literature review has brought me deep insights regarding the meaning of spiritual direction, both from the viewpoint of historical development and the comparison and contrast between psychotherapy and spiritual direction. It has also provided me with practical components for constructing the birth of e-group spiritual direction research. The material persuades me to believe that e-group spiritual direction can be an intertwining between face-to-face encounters and online blogging sessions. Reviewing this literature has really helped me understand and value the meaning and development of spiritual direction as well as gain up-to-date information in the area of technology being used for spiritual and religious purposes. E-group Spiritual Direction will not only meet both spiritual and efficiency needs, but it will also be a way to respect a form of learning of the new generation: the digital natives and immigrants. Copying a good model for group spiritual direction would have been very satisfying for me if I had been able to find one to suit the needs of my directees, but it appears that the Spirit of God is really moving toward an entirely new concept of integrating spiritual direction with cyber technology – certainly there is risk involved, but there is also great promise of sharing values of faith and Christian lifestyles online in an intimate way.

E-Group Spiritual Direction will not be a group for intellectual knowledge but a place where people may drop their masks of performance and perfection – a place for people to be who they truly are and express their deepest desires and dreams believing that Christ will fulfill them (Webb, 2005). It is to respond to those who naturally yearn to belong and to make connections for deeper relationships both with God and their fellow human beings. This e-spiritual direction group will exist based on shared values or Christian lifestyles, and it will be focused on nurturing souls and deepening relationships. E-group spiritual direction will need strong spiritual leaders to guide the groups toward Christian community living where they can find energy with those gathering together to experience God and deepen relationships with each other in this constantly changing world (Webb, 2005). I am convinced that we should not limit the Spirit of God by making Spiritual direction solely face-to-face individualized sessions because the Spirit of God still has the power to inspire, touch and act for an electronically connected spiritual direction *group*. I believe that we should give a chance to group spiritual direction, hand in hand with the cyber world, to produce new birth so that our spiritual hunger may be nurtured with a spark of hope to take us into the new century of spiritual jubilation.

The Plan

Purpose

To encourage individuals to commit themselves to be responsible for their spiritual growth.

Problem

The more people who know how much God loves them personally, the more changes one may expect. The situation that I want to improve is to create this eGroup-SpiritualDirection experience to increase the spiritual engagement of the believers. By a well-blended model with a 60% percent online and 40% face-to-face setting, believers will be encouraged to explore God's unconditional love and nurture their own spiritual growth.

Research Questions:

Can group interaction using the combined tools of spiritual direction and the Internet provide an effective process for adults to grow in the spiritual life both personally and communally?

Would the quality and quantity of personal Internet responses provide criteria for measuring growth in spirituality and community?

Would questionnaires at the beginning and the end of the year provide information to judge both personal growth and a sense of community?

Research Background:

Webb, (2005), Campbell, 2005, and Wyche, Harvel & Grinter, 2006. These resources affirmed the fact that virtual communities will continue to grow and flourish online. They linked technology and small group learning, and this persuaded me to believe that internet-based communities can be valuable for encouraging commitment to spiritual growth. The above-mentioned resources provided the most practical insights from different studies and evaluations. By presenting a variety of pros and cons regarding the use of electronic tools to connect a small group of people for spiritual direction, they enabled me to make wise decisions for my action research.

What I have learned about this endeavor from these resources includes:

- Technology has been successfully used in the area of religion and spirituality.
- In contradistinction to the criticism that religion and spirituality are better communicated directly face-to-face, research has shown that certain spiritual experiences occurring online have created more intimacy and have been of greater value to certain individuals.
- Online spiritual connection can be as authentic as interactions taking place elsewhere.
- There needs to be something other than typical religious services for alienated contemporary spiritual seekers.

MY ACTIONS (Cycle 1): The research question

- If I set up a digital context for interaction around spiritual direction will this encourage the growth of spirituality in the participants?
- Would setting up a face-to-face small group spiritual direction experience for participants be a good starting point for establishing a year-long online spiritual

journey?

- Would providing the cyber space for each individual at Grou.ps increase adults' commitment to their own spirituality by making it easier for them to reflect their daily faith journey?
- Can the use of the internet combined with face-to-face group interaction enhance the effectiveness of Group Spiritual Direction?

The first actions that I have already taken include: creating a basic format for our first Face-to-Face Session and building the website –

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

I chose an on-line tool for participants to blog. In class, I learned many new possible tools for the purpose of eGroup-SpiritualDirection. Since I am not an experienced IT person, I first tried out various tools, such as: Google site, Grou.ps, Voicethread, Skype, Facebook, and email before I created the website for participants. With high recommendation from two friends from my study circle, I decided to try Grou.ps for the participants to make entries / to blog. As a result, I established two on-line sites –http://grou.ps/tagalonggang/private_groups, and http://grou.ps/tagalonggang2010/private_groups -- the first on September 8th and the second on September 17th because two members could not get into the initial site. At the present time, the sites are not functioning because grou.ps is emerging with another big company. Our Spiritual Direction Group decided to use email for their temporary needs.

During Cycle One, I have been consistently monitoring the on-line activities. I took some photos of the sites showing that the same entries were repeated seven and eight times. Participants have been excited to post their entries; however, there are two

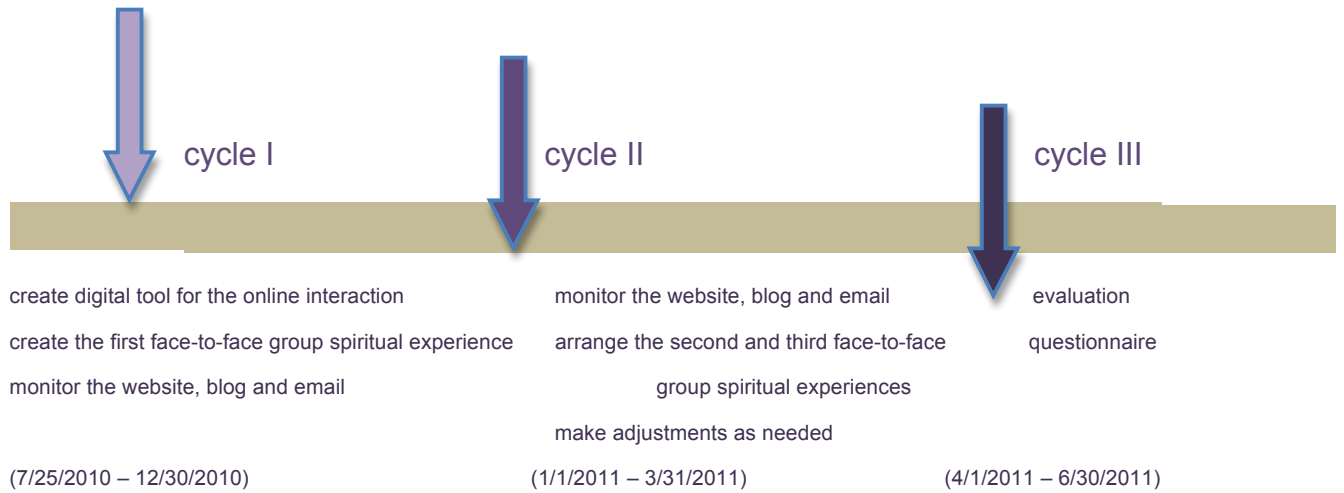
participants who have not made any entries so far.

Finally, the last action that I took in Cycle One was to build another site, this time with Google, to replace groups to see if that would make any significant improvement.

(Cycle 2): While the results and my reflections on them may modify my plans significantly, my current thoughts on my cycles of action are described below:

This assignment has been very helpful for me to look at the cycles. It has assisted me to organize my thoughts for my Action Research. From this exercise, I have been able to clarify my steps regarding where I want to place my focus in each cycle. In Cycle One, my action has been focused on creating the format of EGroup-SpiritualDirection. It has been in the process of creating and implementing the tools that I have been able to have a better understanding regarding how to evaluate the project more effectively. In Cycle Two, my effort will be to concentrate on evaluating the effectiveness of the format and the tools being used for EGroup-SpiritualDirection with an aim to make specific changes according to input from classes, readings, and the experiences of the participants. Cycle Three will contain the evaluation regarding the effect on the spiritual growth of the individuals involved in the project – whether or not EGroup-SpiritualDirection has made a difference in these five people's journey of faith. It will be a time to bring EGroup-SpiritualDirection to a more refined stage for finalization of the research.

Timeline of events:



Cycle One

INTRODUCTION

At the last parish where I served for six years, many parishioners were well educated, both academically and in their faith; however, some adults still complained that they were confused about their own personal faith journey. They wondered where they could get some guidance. These were caring people, but they considered themselves very busy with family and work as well as Church and social activities. They did, however, have sufficient financial stability to access the cyber world and most of them were competent in technological devices. I have had training in spiritual direction, and I am aware that it can potentially bring people closer to God. As a teacher and presenter, I have also had experience in group dynamics, and I realize that group interaction can enhance and inspire collaboration within a community, so I developed a plan where we could share our faith journeys online and be helpful to each other. This parish group seemed to be one that might benefit by e-group spiritual direction. Through e-group spiritual direction, I can invite interested persons to become directees and accept greater personal responsibility for the spiritual aspect of being human. E-group spiritual direction can offer a safe environment to explore prayer practices, meditation, spiritual experiences, and a groups' growing desire to draw closer to God as God's beloved sons and daughters. This parish group's reaching out for spiritual growth and guidance was the inspiration for my developing E-group Spiritual Direction.

My plan for E-group Spiritual Direction is designed as a mixed program model, with 60% percent interaction done online and 40% of the communication taking place at face-to-face group meetings. Using the model of the Pepperdine Learning Technologies Cadre Camp and online learning process, I designed a program combining my knowledge and experience of spiritual direction with my new knowledge of online communication using forums and blogs. Similar to the structure of the learning circles used in the Pepperdine program, I decided to invite five people to begin our e-group spiritual direction. Each of these persons would be asked to attend a workshop/ retreat camp to begin the program. Through the retreat experience, each directee could better understand the purpose and format of the e-group spiritual direction as well as become acquainted with the other directees. They could, then, decide if they really wanted to accompany each other for this spiritual journey for a year. Each of those who decided to continue the spiritual journey together would create his/her own symbol before adjourning to home and work places. The directees would commit to making their online entries at least two times a week and to meeting three to four times a year according to the desire of the group.

My plan for a blended e-group spiritual direction combining face-to-face group meetings with online blogging to form small group spiritual companionship, will not only meet spiritual needs, but it will also be a way to respect the form of learning that is common and comfortable for the new generation of digital natives and immigrants.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Can group interaction using the combined tools of spiritual direction and the Internet provide an effective process for adults to grow personally and communally in their spiritual life?

Would the quality and quantity of personal Internet responses provide criteria for measuring growth in spirituality and community?

Webb, (2005), Campbell, 2005, and Wyche, Harvel & Grinter, 2006, already cited in my literary review, strongly influenced me and affirmed the fact that virtual communities will continue to grow and flourish online. These writers linked technology and small group learning, and persuaded me to believe that internet-based communities can be valuable for encouraging commitment to spiritual growth. Of my numerous references, these authors provided the most practical insights and suggestions. By presenting a variety of pros and cons regarding the use of electronic tools to connect a small group of people for spiritual direction, they enabled me to make effective decisions for my action research.

What I have learned about this endeavor from these resources includes:

- Technology has been successfully used in the area of religion and spirituality.
- In contradistinction to the criticism that religion and spirituality are better communicated directly face-to-face, research has shown that certain spiritual experiences occurring online have created more intimacy and have been of greater value to certain individuals.
- Online spiritual connection can be as authentic as interactions taking place elsewhere.
- There needs to be something other than typical religious services for alienated contemporary spiritual seekers.

ACTION

Part one - creating a basic format for **FACE-TO-FACE SESSION**

Part two - creating a basic format for the **ONLINE EXPERIENCE**

Part one

I set up the basic foundation of the face-to-face component of the e-group

spiritual direction by developing and facilitating the first face-to-face session on July 27-28, 2010.

Five directees were invited to come and to commit with each other for a yearlong faith journey. The theme was “Tagging Along with God.” The theme was chosen because God invites us everyday to tag along with God’s self to witness to God’s glory. It is because of God’s gift of free will that we can accept or decline God’s invitation. Sometimes we choose to reject the tag along experience with God because we only see sadness and pain in our situations, forgetting that God’s love is unconditional, and this loving God chooses us personally to witness to God’s power, mercy and miracles.

The session began with the word game “Association.” Directees were given certain words and expressed their association with the meaning according to their own experiences. However, God may associate the same words differently. After delivering the concept of learning to see God’s way, I offered three personal examples and invited each directee to share his or her own sacred stories. Before the first evening was over, directees were encouraged to find a scripture story similar to their own sacred “Tag Along story” to share with the group on the next day. The exercise was intended to assist directees to grasp that God is present in our world yesterday, today, and tomorrow and that God reveals God’s self to each one of us as God revealed God’s self to people in the past. We are all precious in God’s eyes.

On the second full day, directees were given some free time before and after breakfast to reflect and pray. After an introduction regarding small group spiritual direction, with much stress on confidentiality, directees were able to experience their first face-to-face component of small group spiritual direction. Each person shared one sacred story, without interruption while all other directees were encouraged to offer their empathetic listening skills. No comments were allowed while each person shared her/his sacred story. Immediately after a specific directee finished sharing, all of the others maintained silence to listen to the Holy Spirit within themselves. Then each person in the group was allowed one question for the speaker to consider until all directees had a chance to share.

This process took a long time during two segments of the afternoon schedule. I then, introduced the electronic component and set up the website for the directees to use as a tool leading to greater commitment and online sharing until the next face-to-face gathering.

Part two

Creating the website

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

The purpose of this website is to provide a format for me as the director of the e-group spiritual direction to communicate with my directees. I want to offer some insights and extra information regarding what spiritual direction is according to some famous theologians. It also gives me a chance to offer some suggested readings to enhance the quality of the online experiences of e-group spiritual direction.

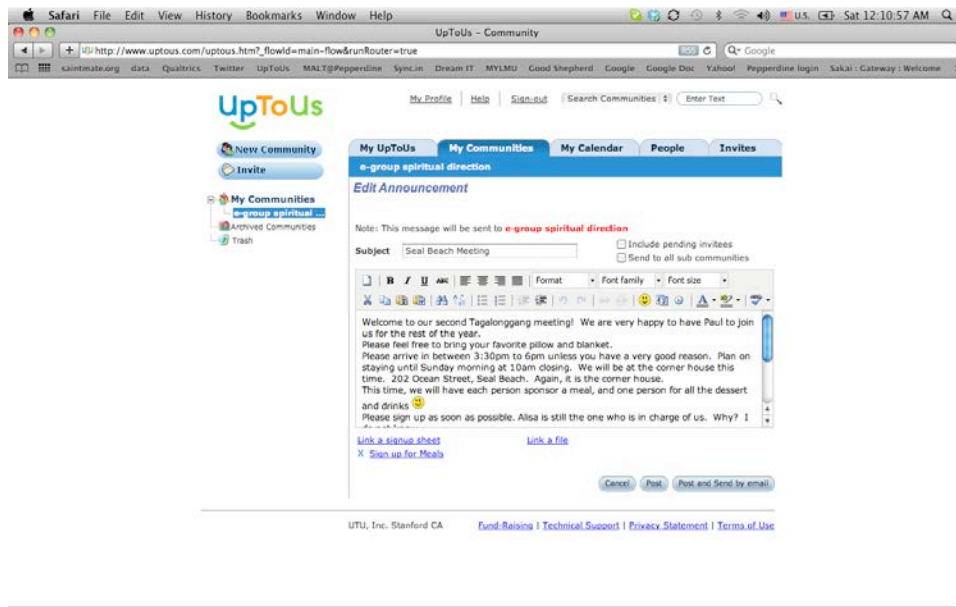
Choosing an on-line tool for directees to blog:

Through class instruction, I have learned of many tools that may possibly be used for the purpose of e-group spiritual direction. Since I am not an experienced IT person, I first tried various electronic sources, such as: Google site, Grou.ps, Voicethread, Skype, Facebook, Email, Adobe Acrobat, before I created the website for directees. With high recommendation from two friends from my learning circle, I decided to use Grou.ps for the directees to make entries or to blog.

REACTION

On September 8th, I established http://grou.ps/tagalonggang/private_groups, and on September 17th, I created another site http://grou.ps/tagalonggang2010/private_groups because two members could not get into the initial site. Currently, the site is not functioning and the group decided to use email for their temporary needs. I am building a new website using Google site to see if that will make any difference. Some photos of the sites show that the same entries were repeated seven and eight times. Most directees have been excited to post their entries; however, there are two directees who have not made any entries so far.

A new website option needs to be considered. I may need to take a step backwards to reconstruct a website for the directees to share their spiritual journeys more effectively. Unfortunately, I received twenty-four emails, plus a few phone calls, saying that the directees could not get into the website. Some evidence shown from the website indicated that the same entries were repeated eight times for several accounts. Grou.ps is not working, so I will try other tools such as Google site, Wikispaces and UpToUs.



EVIDENCE

One way to measure the positive effectiveness of this small group face-to-face spiritual direction is to examine the number and type of comments shared in emails. Five emails were received after the over-night retreat and all of them expressed their positive feelings about the time spent in this spiritual experience: they each felt the Spirit of God stirring within them as they shared deeply among themselves. (see Appendix C)

Another measure of the success was that a number of people wanted to join the group after hearing the directees sharing their weekend experience. Seven email exchanges were from persons requesting entrance into the group; however most directees felt that newcomers would be disruptive to the already bonded group. Only one new person was accepted by 100% of the group, and that particular person had initially been invited to join this e-group spiritual direction but had an excused absence. (See Appendix D.)

The survey reflected thoughts directees had pertaining to their own spirituality. Before directees encountered their e-group spiritual direction, two directees saw their own spirituality at the lukewarm level. One defined it as “healthy but needing some new energy and focus.” One described it as “naïve and lacking in true thought processes.” And one recalled it as “individualistic and had lost sight of the communal aspect of spiritual life.”

During the face-to-face experience, four directees felt that they had enough time to share what they desired to express, but one wished to have had more time. Four directees were able to share very deep sacred stories with the other directees in the face-to-face

setting because of their trust in the Holy Spirit and in each member. One expressed that face-to-face sharing was much easier because there was instant feedback.

After the face-to-face session, all directees not only became closer to each other, but they also experienced a strong bonding with the Holy Spirit. All directees have talked with their friends, relatives or co-workers about their e-group spiritual direction. Four directees reported that some of their family, co-workers and friends knew they had gone on a retreat, so they wanted to share their experience with them. The directees even entertained some questions from curiosity seekers and co-workers who have various faith and non-faith orientations. One directee identified his reason for sharing about the group spiritual direction experience as an opportunity to educate others regarding different ways of supporting persons on their faith journeys.

After six months, two directees evaluated their own commitment for e-group spiritual direction as good because they found themselves noticing their surroundings more, and seeing room for self-improvement. Two directees classified their commitment as poor because they have not been consistent with sharing through the use of technology. One individual described his commitment as fair because he used others as the gauge of his rating.

Finally, in order to report the survey with authenticity, I would like to end with some direct quotations from each directee on why they would all recommend e-group spiritual direction to others. (Please see Appendix II for the detail of the survey)

- "It is a good activity in-between retreats as long as people participate."
- "Instead of just having one person guide me, I have a small group with different spiritual gifts guiding me to the complete picture of my life."
- "It's good to get technology involved in blessing people's lives."
- "The support and communal aspect of the spiritual journey is very much needed. Those who use the computer to communicate on a regular basis may find it more helpful."
- "Everyone needs direction no matter where they are in their spiritual life."
- "Yes, because it serves as a reminder why we make particular decisions in life – and hopefully will continue to help refine our relationship with God and others, making us better versions of ourselves."
- "Things kind of clicked and went so fast, it could never have been planned out so smoothly."
- "Because it was like the group members were led to help me assemble the puzzle pieces of what was going on in my life."
- "The profoundness of the sharing did not feel of this world, lacked a sense of condemnation and judgment."
- "It led me to God and not away from God. It helped me to be more aware of God's present in my daily life."

By reflecting, I have learned that the agenda for the first face-to-face spiritual direction needs to be clear in all aspects, especially because the group is making a commitment for an entire year, contributing at least two entries every week regarding

their spiritual lives. Since the online blogging has very recently restarted after my creating the new UpToUs website, I was not able to use blogging as an evaluation tool for the online sessions; however, including this tool will certainly be part of my Cycle Two agenda. In order to assess my Cycle One, I decided to send a survey to the directees for them to evaluate their experience of e-group spiritual direction. (Please see Appendix B.)

It takes a strong commitment on the part of the director to establish a small group of people to experience this e-group spiritual direction. Although people were excited about the unfamiliar and new spiritual activity, it took an exchange of forty-two emails before finding dates that are convenient for everyone to participate in the next overnight retreat. The fact that we persevered in our efforts shows a great deal of interest and trust on everyone's part. (Please see Appendix C)

In addition, one of my successful discoveries from Cycle One was that I gained enormous confidence as an online facilitator. Like a person drowning in the ocean, I began to learn and evaluate all kinds of new technology tools to match the purpose for e-group spiritual direction. I received great feedback regarding the draft of my plan from my professor, Dr. Margaret Riel and from my learning circle peers, which helped me match tools to need. For example, Riel suggested doodle.com for facilitating scheduling events. This tool not only helped with my research but also served many other purposes in my work. Having a network to help me match tools to need increases my confidence and expertise in informational, instructional and communication technology.

REFLECTION

This practice of e-group spiritual direction (Tagalong with God) has affected how I think about myself, my practice, values, concepts and identity.

As I continue to build my practice of e-group spiritual direction (Tagalong with God) based on my values of discerning the Spirit of God and responding to that Spirit, I realize that I am growing in self-awareness. What God does through each one of us fills me with gratitude and wonder. At the same time that I am delighted that directees and I are growing in recognition of God's presence in our lives, I am also aware that everything really belongs to God – the work and the results. Building my practice on the concept of God's love for each one of us, especially that each of us is beloved of God and precious in God's eyes helps me to remain dedicated, committed, and respectful of each person and of the process. Because I believe in the concepts that the timing of my perfect God is perfect and that sometimes we have to wait for inspiration and results, I can be patient as well as appreciative.

The concept that most affected my thinking is that it really does not matter what I think I am good at, or what I wish to do. If I am doing what God is asking of me, that work gives me life, healing, comfort, consolation and peace. Spiritual direction may not

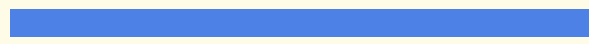
be for me or for everybody today, but the concepts and values behind the practice obviously bring tremendous fruits and hope to many people.

The action and reactions involved in this program have shaped my understanding of the workplace. I have gained knowledge about the way people relate to each other and to me. I see others in a different way now. Instead of focusing on the brokenness of each person, I witness the beauty of peace, joy and contentment as they surrender themselves to God. With their permission, God was able to manifest God's glory in them as they corresponded to God's grace. My relationship with this small group of people is not based on the concept of director being superior to directees, but rather on the concept of companionship on our mutual faith journey to God. I certainly expect to see some other changes in the future.

Cycle One helps me to understand that we are living in a wounded world, where everyone has her/his own sacred story to share if there is a safe environment provided for sharing it. The more online communication that takes place among the group members, the more I am convinced that cyberspace, in addition to a face-to-face retreat-spot two or three times a year, constitute the workplace. Directees said that prior to this first face-to-face retreat they had never shared their deep spiritual feelings – neither with family nor with friends. Their sacred stories brought tears and laughter. This diverse small group of five directees represents various ethnic cultures: Japanese, Korean, Mexican and American; and I am Chinese. The way we all respect and treat each other is a total gift from God. I am seeing unity within diversity.

As an action researcher, I have gleaned valuable insights from my experiences as well as from the survey (Appendix C). A survey with seventeen questions was produced and sent to all the directees on December 5, 2010. The results from the survey reflected positively regarding eGroup-SpiritualDirection. One-hundred percent of the participants indicated that they have talked with relatives, co-workers and/or friends about eGroup-SpiritualDirection, and they signified that they would recommend such a group to others. All participants claimed that they experienced the work of the Holy Spirit during the first face-to-face session. Most participants (80%) felt no pressure to share from their inmost being more than they felt comfortable in sharing. The insights that I have gained are grouped around the role of the facilitator, the size and stability of the group, and use of online technology as well as the wisdom from this project that can be used as leverage for pursuing other forms of learning.

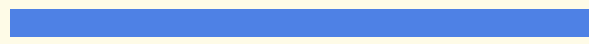
1. Have you talked with anybody about your e-group spiritual direction?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		5	100%
2	No		0	0%
	Total		5	100%

10. Did you experience the work of the Holy Spirit during the first face-to-face session?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		5	100%
2	No		0	0%

16. Would you recommend anyone for e-group spiritual direction?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		5	100%
2	No		0	0%
	Total		5	100%

List of insights:

Role of the facilitator

It is important for the facilitator to provide clear instruction and objectives for e-group spiritual direction. The facilitator needs to communicate some sharing tools and rules regarding confidentiality. The facilitator also needs to explain that the directees have the option when and to what level to share their personal stories. It is also the role of the facilitator to help the group see that no one needs to be a rescuer, a victim, or a critic among the small group.

Size and stability of the group

I would not recommend more than six people for each group because of the intensity of sharing and listening as well as the amount of time it takes to provide quality and authentic attention.

It is the facilitator's thought that the whole group needs to agree on welcoming a new comer in the midst of the year of commitment, and this would probably be by exception, because a newcomer will change the interaction of the group.

Rather than enlarge an existing group, the researcher deems it more expedient to start a new group. The researcher has discovered that when directees talk to their friends about their spiritual direction, it supports the directees' interest, and it spreads interest among more people; then, greater understanding about spiritual direction may develop among more people, and new groups may evolve.

Use of online technology

It is a good idea to practice the online tool before members of the small group go on their separate ways.

It is also important for each directee to accept ownership of the e-group. Perhaps it is best to have the small group choose its own media tool to communicate with each other throughout the year in order to provide sufficient support. Through online technology, directees can listen and respond to the needs of others, without judging each person's faith journey.

Leverage for pursuing other forms of learning

Some of my new learnings can be applied to other kinds of situations or experiences. The format of e-group spiritual direction can also be used for spiritual growth and enrichment in other settings that need flexible support.

a. E-catechetical support group

E-catechetical support can be perfect for the sponsors of catechumens (persons who are newly introduced to the faith). Some sponsors mentioned that they forgot their catechism and some were from missionary countries where they had never received proper catechisms. E-catechetical support group can offer the opportunities for sponsors to refresh and renew their knowledge and commitment. This small group of sponsors can regularly meet together with a facilitator three or four times in face-to-face sessions to build stronger leadership for the catechumens.

b. E-catechist mentor group

Catholic parishes have many volunteer catechists who may not have had proper training. An e-catechist mentor group can provide a place online where

volunteers are able to ask questions without feeling embarrassed or judged whenever they wish to seek the truth. In addition, catechists would also have a chance to meet each other face-to-face occasionally and build stronger faith community.

c. E-family bible group

Families who are living in all different places but would like to have a Family Bible Study can do online entries to share their thoughts of the scripture and set aside two or three times a year to meet personally at a home or even at a vacation spot.

d. E-matter of the heart

E-matter of the heart can be a safe place for a small group of people to come together to share their hearts with a quality group of people regularly. A person who wants to share ideas as well as struggles can join a group with similar goals. This group of people will commit themselves with a gift of empathetic listening online. They may also meet together two or three times a year to renew and bond with each other.

f. E-religious education parent support

E-religious education parent support group can provide opportunities for parents to share how to raise certain age group of children in a faith environment. Parents can participate online regularly according to their own time as well as schedule a few meetings during the year to practice their faith in parenting.

These valuable insights from my experiences and survey, my collaborators, my learning circles, and my advisor have expanded my thinking and reinforced my confidence as I realize that the structure of e-group spiritual direction is a formula that can successfully be applied to various situations. Technology provides a cyberspace environment that is flexible and gives the participants quality support and communication on-demand without restrictions of time and space. It is also exciting to visualize how ideas, experiments and projects can grow exponentially by collaborating. Creativity knows no bounds, and the miracles continue.

Cycle Two

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.

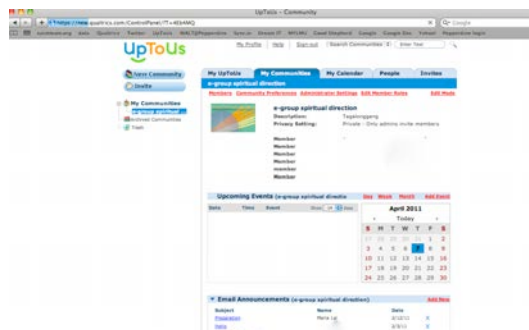
Cycle Two Question

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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection.

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. (Please see the Appendix K)



I created opportunities during the session for participants to contribute suggestions for improving the structure of eGroup-SpiritualDirection. 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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection.

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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection. 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. EGroup-SpiritualDirection 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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection.

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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection sessions 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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection.

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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection 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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection and to publicize its possibilities and advantages.

Cycle Three

Introduction

During this time between Cycle Two and Cycle Three, eGroup-SpiritualDirection participants and leader are 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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection model can be combined with the traditional face-to-face session, and whether it would be beneficial for the new candidates of eGroup-SpiritualDirection. In Cycle Three, I plan 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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection 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 21st 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 K.)

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 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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection.

<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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection. All respondents have made some decisions differently because of eGroup-SpiritualDirection; all respondents found that eGroup-SpiritualDirection 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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection 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 14th, the date we did the i-Movie filming, two out of the three candidates have emailed me expressing further interest in eGroup-SpiritualDirection: One prospective directee wrote that she “could not wait to do the blogging”; another emailed asking for the eGroup-SpiritualDirection 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 21st 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."
- "EGroup-SpiritualDirection 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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection 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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection.

I am very delighted that the i-Movie gave me a wonderful opportunity to further advertise eGroup-SpiritualDirection 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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection 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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection as I witness these first generation Asians who are willing to share so deeply from their hearts.

Final 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 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, 2004). 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, 2004)

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.

Appendix A

A Comparative Summary

Pastoral Care

A mutual ministry
Deals with life cycle and has sustained involvement
Crosses all worlds and elements
Both initiated and responsive care
Includes all persona and ages
Impulse is often crisis driven, both situational and maturational
No contract or fee
Central agenda is overall conditions for growth and fulfillment of life centered in God
Focus is on greater self-understanding, agency, and formation of healthy ego
Begins with presenting concern and behavior
Explores the why, what, and how
Raises to consciousness the conversation between life experience, faith and culture
Both public and private/confidential encounters
Methods include listening, confession, diagnosis, analysis, interpretation, feedback, guidance
Exploration of options, provision of reality-based hope, and discerning God “in the midst of all of life”

Requires training in pastoral care and ethics

Spiritual Direction

A shared spiritual journey
Time-restricted and disciplined involvement
Deals primarily with the spiritual world
Responsive or by referral
Attends to particular persons, usually adults
Impulse is personal spiritual need
Contractual and fee/ donation for service
Central agenda is attending to the presence/action of God in the life of the individual
Focus is on developing a relationship with God and reduction of ego-dependence
Begins with experience and prayer life
Explores the who and where questions
Raises to consciousness the conversation between self-will and the will of God
A confidential and private encounter
Methods include listening, story-telling, feedback, discernment, direction
Exploration of what is happening to faith in the midst and affirming life experience as revelation of the divine

Requires training in spiritual direction and ethical guidelines for directors

Stairs, J. (2000). *Listening for the soul: Pastoral care and spiritual direction*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. P.189

Appendix B

The following table suggests some possible differences among spiritual direction, Psychotherapy, and Pastoral counseling:

	Spiritual Direction	Psychotherapy	Pastoral Counseling
Person seeking help:	Wants to discover action of God in life	Wants cure	Wants relief from troubles
Origin of the Process:	Experience of promise prompted by the Holy Spirit	Experience of pain	Experience of problem
Model of the Process:	Companion and guide	Doctor	Teacher
Relationship operative in the Process:	Two disciples moving toward the Lord under the guidance of the Spirit	Healer-patient	Teacher-pupil
Attitude of Helping person:	“God is with us”	“I am the Doctor.”	We can solve this problem together
Goal of the Process:	Movement toward union with God	Self-acceptance, ability to function in society	Reconciliation, guidance in decision-making
Method of the Process:	Surrender to God, letting go of whatever blocks union with God	Application of professional techniques aimed at specific results	Use of relationship with client for beneficial results
Dynamics of the Process:	Awareness, awakening, noticing, discovery, conversion	Healing of attitudes and behaviors	Solution of problems
Objective of the Process:	“The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me.” (Gal 2:20)	“I am now free, balanced and healthy.”	“Now I know how I want to spend my life.”

M. Scharf, ARTS OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION COURSE, 19 lecture, May 9, 2009.

Appendix C

I was given permission by the directees, both verbally and by emails, to share their emails for the purpose of learning. I will attach a more formal signed document after the second face-to-face session by the end of February 2011. I have not altered their emails in any way.

One day after the first face-to-face experience (group spiritual direction), I received the following emails:

Email I -

“Thank you for letting me tag along on the retreat. I have to admit it was one of the best retreat experiences for me because all day I was reminded to tag along with Jesus. Even more than all the silent retreats in Community I found this simple exercise will be my daily practice. This is a concrete way of putting our Faith into action. Thank you for being such a wonderful Sister to me. I know you are always looking out for what is best for me. I am sure each member of the tag along gang feels the same way. See, I am trying to be better at responding to my emails. See you sometime. (If you are not busy on Labor Day maybe we can get together).”

Email II –

The first night at home from the retreat I felt a sense of peace, calmness and exhaustion, if all that together is possible.

However, the next day, I felt angry, not at my step father but at myself. As I talk about my childhood experience, the pain comes rushing back and that makes me mad. Every time I relive the pain I'm the victim again and again. I'm upset at myself for allowing that to happen. I need to take back my childhood and let the pain go. I need to be able to talk about it without crying. That's my goal to take back my life, not to be a victim, to set an example for others that yes you can go on when something traumatic happens in your life.

It was difficult not to be able to analysis everyone's issues, I'm so used to saying it will be ok, or you should try this, or stop doing that, etc. The format was great, no one was judgmental. I went home with questions that I need to answer for myself.

What a fantastic weekend. Thank you again, Sister.

Email III –

Hi Sister. Thanks for the weekend. It was wonderful. I miss the ocean already. I also forgot to take the "How to be an Adult" book. Can you bring to our next meeting?
Thanks again,

Email IV –

I was really touched by this story and I thought you would be too! Thank you for touching my life.

The pickle jar as far back as I can remember sat on the floor beside the dresser in my parents' bedroom.

When he got ready for bed, Dad would empty his pockets and toss his coins into the jar. As a small boy, I was always fascinated at the sounds the coins made as they were dropped into the jar.

They landed with a merry jingle when the jar was almost empty. Then the tones gradually muted to a dull thud as the jar was filled.

I used to squat on the floor in front of the jar to admire the copper and silver circles that glinted like a pirate's treasure when the sun poured through the bedroom window. When the jar was filled, Dad would sit at the kitchen table and roll the coins before taking them to the bank.

Taking the coins to the bank was always a big production. Stacked neatly in a small cardboard box, the coins were placed between Dad and me on the seat of his old truck.

Each and every time, as we drove to the bank, Dad would look at me hopefully. 'Those coins are going to keep you out of the textile mill, son. You're going to do better than me. This old mill town's not going to hold you back.'

Also, each and every time, as he slid the box of rolled coins across the counter at the bank toward the cashier, he would grin proudly. 'These are for my son's college fund. He'll never work at the mill all his life like me.'

We would always celebrate each deposit by stopping for an ice cream cone. I always got chocolate. Dad always got vanilla. When the clerk at the ice cream parlour handed Dad his change, he would show me the few coins nestled in his palm. 'When we get home, we'll start filling the jar again.' He always let me drop the first coins into the empty jar. As they rattled around with a brief, happy jingle, we grinned at each other. 'You'll get to college on pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters,' he said. 'But you'll get there; I'll see to that.'

No matter how rough things got at home, Dad continued to doggedly drop his coins into the jar. Even the summer when Dad got laid off from the mill, and Mama had to serve dried beans several times a week, not a single dime was taken from the jar.

To the contrary, as Dad looked across the table at me, pouring catsup over my beans to make them more palatable, he became more determined than ever to make a way out for

me 'When you finish college, Son,' he told me, his eyes glistening, 'You'll never have to eat beans again - unless you want to.'

The years passed, and I finished college and took a job in another town. Once, while visiting my parents, I used the phone in their bedroom, and noticed that the pickle jar was gone. It had served its purpose and had been removed.

A lump rose in my throat as I stared at the spot beside the dresser where the jar had always stood. My dad was a man of few words: he never lectured me on the values of determination, perseverance, and faith. The pickle jar had taught me all these virtues far more eloquently than the most flowery of words could have done. When I married, I told my wife Susan about the significant part the lowly pickle jar had played in my life as a boy. In my mind, it defined, more than anything else, how much my dad had loved me.

The first Christmas after our daughter Jessica was born, we spent the holiday with my parents. After dinner, Mom and Dad sat next to each other on the sofa, taking turns cuddling their first grandchild. Jessica began to whimper softly and Susan took her from Dad's arms. 'She probably needs to be changed,' she said, carrying the baby into my parents' bedroom to diaper her. When Susan came back into the living room, there was a strange mist in her eyes.

She handed Jessica back to Dad before taking my hand and leading me into the room. 'Look,' she said softly, her eyes directing me to a spot on the floor beside the dresser. To my amazement, there, as if it had never been removed, stood the old pickle jar, the bottom already covered with coins. I walked over to the pickle jar, dug down into my pocket, and pulled out a fistful of coins. With a gamut of emotions choking me, I dropped the coins into the jar. I looked up and saw that Dad, carrying Jessica, had slipped quietly into the room. Our eyes locked, and I knew he was feeling the same emotions I felt. Neither one of us could speak.

This truly touched my heart. Sometimes we are so busy adding up our troubles that we forget to count our blessings. Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture you can change a person's life, for better or for worse.

God puts us all in each other's lives to impact one another in some way. Look for GOOD in others.

The best and most beautiful things cannot be seen or touched - they must be felt with the heart ~ Helen Keller

- Happy moments, praise God.
- Difficult moments, seek God.
- Quiet moments, worship God.
- Painful moments, trust God.
- Every moment, thank God.

Some samples of sacred stories-

EMAIL V-

To my fellow tag along friends:

I hope you had a very blessed Christmas and a joyful beginning to the New Year. I wanted to share a miracle story with you and ask you to pray with me in thanksgiving to the Lord for His goodness. About a week before Christmas my mother had an accident at home. She was moving a heavy piece of furniture from upstairs to downstairs by herself. When she got to the bottom step she slipped and the furniture fell right on top of her knee. She ended up breaking leg in several places. We were hoping a simple cast would fix the problem but the doctors immediately said it would require a titanium plate and screws to repair the leg.

My mother is now 60 years old and does not have any medical insurance. The doctor my brother took her to suggest that we take her to County USC. She was in the hospital for 10 days before she finally received the surgery. Needless to say my father was very worried about the medical bills. Without insurance we heard it would cost \$10,000 per night. My mother is definitely a woman of Faith. Placing our trust in the Lord we prayed that the surgery would go well and decided to put the financial situation in God's hands.

A financial coordinator came in to see my mom and said she could sign up for ATP (Ability to Pay). I did a little research and found out that she was not eligible for Medi-Cal because she was not old enough. Of course our first concern was to make sure that the surgery would go well. My mom had her surgery on December 23. The doctor told us not to count on her being home for Christmas. The very next day we received the first miracle. The doctor said she could go home as long as she could use a walker. She came home on Christmas eve.

On January 3, I took my mother in for her first doctor's appointment. Before going to the appointment I suggested we should stop by the ATP office to ask for financial assistance. According to our calculations, it would cost \$100,000 just for waiting in the hospital for the surgery. This cost was not counting the surgery itself, which supposedly cost another \$20,000. My mother stayed in the car with my father and I was sent in to do all the paper work. They called me in and said my mother didn't need to come into the office as long as I had all the information they needed. I prayed the whole time I was in the office and asked to Lord to open my mouth only when needed. The gentleman who processed the papers asked one question. "Did she work at all starting last December to present?" I answered honestly, "no". The financial coordinator then gathered some papers and said, "I just need my supervisor to approve this." Went away for a few minutes and came back saying that the entire cost of her hospital bills was covered. She owes \$0.00.

PRAISE GOD! He is the healer and the miracle worker. With no effort on our part God took care of the entire situation in an instant. All I did was tag along to witness the miracle. May each of you witness the miracles of God as you tag along with Him every day this year. Thank you for praying in gratitude with me and with my family. God is a Good and Loving Father who definitely take care of ALL our needs. God Bless you and

Running Head: eGroup-SpiritualDirection

may each of you have a Hopefilled New Year!

Appendix D

Initial Report

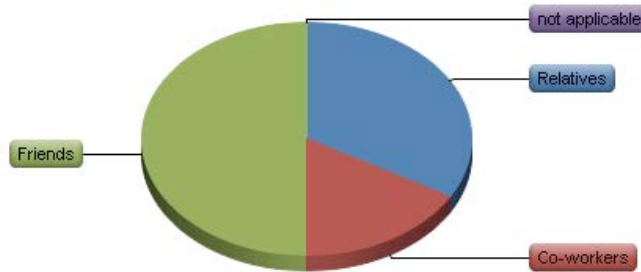
Last Modified: 02/15/2011

Filter By: Report Subgroup

1. Have you talked with anybody about your eGroup-SpiritualDirection?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	5	100%
2	No	0	0%
	Total	5	100%

2. Who are the people?



3. Why did you choose to share with them?

Text Response

wanted to share the experience

They knew I was at the retreat and was curious what we did.

they are a mix of faith and non-practicing persons, they find me very easy to ask questions without judgment nor bias.

To let them know there are different ways of supporting each other on our Faith Journey

That we meet for a weekend retreat and share our experiences.

To let them know that I'm trying to expand my relationship with God and to refocus how I'm living my life.

4. What was the reaction from those to whom you spoke about the eGroup-SpiritualDirection?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Pursued the conversation	5	83%
2	Changed the topic	0	0%
3	Were shocked	0	0%
4	Not applicable	1	17%
	Total	6	100%

5. How would you describe your spiritual life before joining this eGroup-SpiritualDirection?

Text Response

Ok

I would say I go to daily Mass, go to conferences, and do other things now and then.

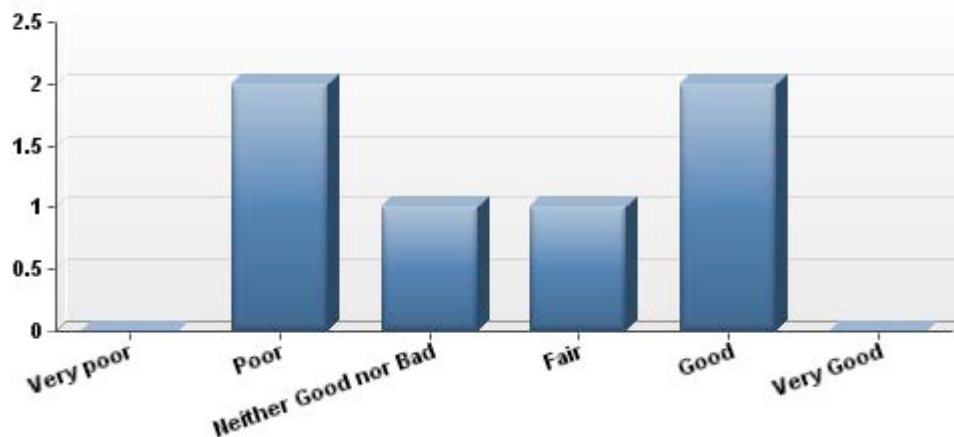
naive, lacking in true thought processes

Individualistic. I lost sight of the communal aspect of spiritual life.

About the same

Healthy, but needing some new energy and focus.

6. How would you rate your own commitment for eGroup-SpiritualDirection?



7. Why would you rate your commitment in that level?

Text Response

I have noticed my surroundings more

I have not been sharing new things on the web page as much as I should be.

I didn't see participation from my fellow directees :(
 I have not been very consistent with sharing through the use of technology.
 Not doing my part in blogging my experiences.
 Because I know there's room for improvement, but realize that it's doing wonderful things for me.

8. Why were you able to share such deep sacred stories with the other directees in this face-to-face setting?

Text Response

because I know all of the people

I think I knew everyone in the group, so the trust was already there.



Holy Spirit

Face to face sharings are much easier because there is an immediate response whether it is verbal or non verbal.

Trust

n/a

9. Did you feel you had enough time to share what you desired to share?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes		4 80%
2	No		1 20%
	Total		5 100%

10. Did you experience the work of the Holy Spirit during the first face-to-face session?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes		5 100%
2	No		0 0%

11. How do you know that it was the work of the Holy Spirit?

Text Response

things kind of clicked and went so fast, it could never have been planned out so smoothly

Because it was like the group members were led to help me assemble the puzzle pieces of what was going on in my life.

the profoundness of the sharing did not feel of this world, lacked a sense of condemnation and judgment

It led me to God and not away from God. It helped me to be more aware of God's presence in my daily life.

Normally would not share just information unless I know the person/persons very well...it as not difficult to talk about, very comfortable

12. Did you feel pressure to share from your inmost being more than you felt comfortable in sharing?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	1	20%
2	No	4	80%
	Total	5	100%

13. How would you describe your spiritual life after six months into joining this eGroup-SpiritualDirection?

#	Answer	Min Value	Max Value	Average Value	Standard Deviation	Responses
1	Click to write Choice	70	100	81.67	10.33	6

14. How would you describe your relationship with other directees before the first face-to-face experience?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Know and dislike		0	0%
2	Barely know them		0	0%
3	Somewhat acquainted		1	17%
4	Friendly		3	50%
5	Very friendly		2	33%
	Total		6	100%

15. How would you describe your relationship with other directees after six months into joining this eGroup-SpiritualDirection?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Know and dislike		0	0%
2	Barely know them		0	0%
3	Somewhat acquainted		0	0%
4	Friendly		2	33%
5	Very friendly		4	67%
	Total		6	100%

16. Would you recommend anyone for eGroup-SpiritualDirection?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		5	100%
2	No		0	0%
	Total		5	100%

17. Why, or why not?

Text Response

it's a good in-between retreats as long as people participate

Instead of just having one person guide me, I have a small group with different Spiritual gifts guiding me to the complete picture of my life.

it's good to get technology involved in blessing people's lives.

The support and communal aspect of the spiritual journey is very much needed. Those who use the computer to communicate on a regular basis may find it more helpful.

Everyone needs direction no matter where they are in their spiritual life.

Yes, because it serves as a reminder why we make particular decisions in life -- and hopefully will continue to help refine our relationship with God and others, making us better versions of ourselves.

Appendix E

Conversation from an email on December 13, 2010 – “the Moon” (“the Moon” is the symbol of one of the directees)

The black color print is from the researcher. The red color print is from one of the directees, “The Moon.”

- If I set up a digital context for interaction around spiritual direction will this encourage the growth of spirituality in the directees?
I think more interaction would definitely enhance and encourage spirituality.
- Would setting up a face-to-face small group spiritual direction experience for directees be a good starting point for establishing a yearlong online spiritual journey? **Personally, I prefer the face-to face because you can see/hear the emotion. I do prefer the face to face but understand how hard it is to make time to do that. If we have both, I believe things would not get lost or forgotten. I do like the face to face because you can see their face, reactions, tears. You can hear the tone, maybe the fear and excitement. I know for myself, I can't always share what I am feeling with written words. I hope that makes sense. So I would definitely be willing to try harder but would really want to meet at a later time.**
- Does providing the cyber space for each individual at Groups increase adults' commitment to their own spirituality by making it easier for them to reflect their daily faith journey? **If it was set up to easily do, I think it would be a wonderful thing since we can't see or talk to each of the members daily, weekly, etc. We could write down before we forget or lose the excitement of it.**
- Can the use of the internet combined with face-to-face group interaction enhance the effectiveness of Group Spiritual Direction?
Yes because it would keep the momentum going or be the in-between until the next face-to-face.

You have my permission to use any information or even my name for your class since it will benefit you and most likely me.

Appendix F

This is an email exchange sharing that “Smile” wanted to join the group after the directees were talking to their friends. This email was from November 4, 2010. (“Smile,” “Heart,” and “Shamrock” are the symbols that represent different directees).

Hi everybody. I'm still having trouble logging in to the tagalong group blog so I am writing here. Hopefully “Heart” or “Shamrock” wrote that after sharing a great meal at “Smile's house”, he was invited and decided to join our group. We reminisced about the wonderful time at the Seal Beach house. It also looks like we will be able to meet in Jan 2011(!) at Smile's house. The dates are Friday, Saturday, and Sunday 1/14-1/16. Hopefully I will be able to write soon on the blog as I wanted to share about my trip. I saw wonderful places and met the nicest people.
Talk to you all soon,
Moon

Appendix G

Face-To-Face Session I
Ocean Ave, Seal Beach, California
July 27-28, 2010

First Night

4pm – 5pm	Welcome and settling in
5pm – 7pm	Dinner preparation, Dinner and clean up
7:15pm	Warm up activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· The Association Exercise· Introduction regarding Tag Along Spirituality Sharing of the Tagging Along experiences in their own lives· Homework – one Bible story that includes a personal experience· Prayer
10:00 pm	Social hours
11:30 pm	Adjourn

Second Day

8:30 am	Breakfast
9:30 am	Personal time
9:45 am	Introduction of Small Group Spiritual Direction Introduction on Confidentiality Small Group Spiritual Direction Experience I

(Small Group Spiritual Direction: each directee is invited to share a specific spiritual direction issue from his or her own life. No directee is allowed to make any comment, response, or reaction, but to offer the gift of empathic listening. After listening to the speaker, directees are asked to be silent to listen to the Spirit of God before they offer a question in response to the sacred story that they have heard. After all of the directees have had an opportunity to share their questions; the speaker may choose to answer one from among the questions. The above process will continue until all directees have had their chance to share their sacred stories.)

11:00 am	Break
11:15 am	Small group Spiritual Direction Experience II

Running Head: eGroup-SpiritualDirection

12:15 pm	Lunch
1:15 pm	Silent personal prayer: Reflecting on the gift of questions from the Spirit of God through each individual during the small group spiritual direction session Finding a bible story which can be applied to one's personal tagging-along-with-God-experience
2:30 pm	Sharing Introduction on EGroup-SpiritualDirection The idea of Website for E-Group Commitment for a year Choosing symbol for the website
4:15 pm	Closing prayer
5:30 pm	Dinner
7:00 pm	Social hours
9:30 pm	Clean up and adjourn

Appendix H

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY
ACTION RESEARCH: EGROUP-SPIRITUALDIRECTION
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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection. 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 I

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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection
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>)

Running Head: eGroup-SpiritualDirection

- 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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection
- 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

APPENDIX J

Survey Powered By Qualtrics®

Overall, did you have a positive experience with eGroup-SpiritualDirection?

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 eGroup-SpiritualDirection?

Yes, will share the detail below

No

Has eGroup-SpiritualDirection assisted you to be more committed to your Christian living as a believer?

Yes

No

Would you recommend eGroup-SpiritualDirection to anybody?

Yes

No

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

APPENDIX K

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:

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