

Zoom and Training Spiritual Directors: What are we learning?

Notes of the insights coming from conversations in the Zoom session on 21 July.

Over 30 people participated in the two hour session. Most of the conversation happened in small groups.

Initial groups

The groups of three we invited to bring back 3 words after introducing themselves and sharing how they are about being part of this conversation:

- Learning, Inspired, Benefits
- Learning, Happy, Surprised
- Intimacy, Sacred, Innovative
- Problem-solving, Opportunity, Ecological
- Potential, Creative, Companionship
- Positive-sharing, Rumination, Bonding
- Learning, Connecting, Shaping (+ Zoom-neck)
- Opportunity, Less-travel, Overwhelming
- Unexpected, Short
- Opportunity, Caution, Positive-experience

A fascinating introductory set of words, giving a sense of interest and openness, and awareness and encouragement.

Thinking about Training Spiritual Directors and using Zoom:

Some potential areas for focus in the next breakout groups were suggested – using the elements that make up courses and some key questions about the experience of using Zoom. These were:

Elements of course programme:

- Prayer and Worship
- Practising listening - Triads
- Supervision
- Groups
- Teaching, Demonstrations

What are we learning?

- What's better or worse?
- What works, what needs working at?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses?
- What discoveries and insights – good practice, wisdom...?

Group Feedback

The key points emerging from these conversations were reported in the final half hour plenary session.

Road sign ‘Road Closed – Seek alternative route’

- Jo shared this – as an image that describes our journey
- Judy talked of a real stirring of excitement, accessibility, embracing culture, different perspectives

Technicalities of Zoom that need working with

- Best ways for including worship, prayer, use of music
- Using co-hosts, live technical support, team member to manage so that leader of session is free to lead, Zoom Pastor
- Challenge of delay creating ‘asynchronicity’
- Challenges for those with hearing impairment
- Value of ‘mute all’
- Developing Zoom etiquette

Impact of using Zoom on programmes:

Accessibility and inclusion

- More may be able to participate, from further afield; impact of ‘regional’ programmes becoming wider
- Some may be challenged by lack of technical ability or poor internet speeds
- Opens access to more people (less expense in travel, travel time, venue costs, etc)
- God is in the internet!

New awareness in running programme:

- Lots of people on screen can be overwhelming – need for factoring in
- Importance of programming in – ‘informal times’ – the coffee breaks, arriving, moving, allowing informal conversation and contact; creating shared space
- Relationship Building: building relationships on Zoom needs thinking about for an all-Zoom programme
- Give time at beginning to learn how to use Zoom (play with it – eliminate technophobia)

How well does it work?

- Surprisingly positive – this is ‘maybe even better’
- Interviews can be done online
- Listening on Zoom: can you read people as well? New ways of reading developing
- Group membership can be managed
- Triads can work well – observer can turn off their camera

Changes to practice

- Alternative ways being found for doing residential sessions, retreats etc

Future of Training

- Would we go back if we could? Sense that benefits of Zoom are outweighing challenges
- Paula: No-one saying this is an interim stage – exciting

Mixed mode (blended) programmes:

- Some discussion on running courses with some participants in a venue and others on Zoom
- Some courses are expecting to run this way, others might
- Wisdom from other contexts suggests this needs rooms set up with big screens and video cameras to work well

Value of sharing experience

- Whole new way of training and being community is being opened up – world is becoming much smaller, we share responsibility to help each other learn from this

Future Possibilities

- Sue: Church has a Zoom Pub 'Covid Arms' – Could there be a breakout place for SDs?

In the end there was a sense that a new way had been found and that this alternative route was proving to have some serious advantages, and therefore offered opportunities that hadn't been expected. There was a consciousness that there was more to be learnt, and that coming together and sharing experiences and insights was very valuable.

Nick offered to look towards running further sessions in the autumn.

Thanks to all involved.

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