



**Formation through conversation:
mentoring, coaching, supervision
and spiritual direction**

The spoken word ... ushers us into another dimension: relationship with other living beings, with persons.

(Jacques Ellul, 1985)

We live in a technological universe in which we are always communicating. And yet we have sacrificed conversation for mere connection.

(Sherry Turkle, 2015).

1. *how can I improve my practice?*
2. *what skills and habits must I acquire to more faithful in ministry?*
3. *what do I need to learn this year, next year and in five years time as I accept increasing responsibility for the life of the Church and its witness to the world?*
4. *if I am to be a life-long learner, what courses or programs need to be in my study plan?*
5. *where are my personal and ministerial vulnerabilities?*
6. *what must I rely more on God to bring about through my ministry?*
7. *how can I become more disciplined in the exercise of my vocation?*
8. *how have my gifts developed over the past one, two and five years?*
9. *what new gifts or unexpected abilities have I discerned?*
10. *in what ways has my sense of vocation changed in recent times?*
11. *where is God leading me and the Church in which I am called to be a leader?*

**The changing patterns of
conversation for formation
is the specific focus of inquiry**

First I will describe the kind of conversation, then formation, that emerges from digital connections.

Second, I propose that the embodied relationship with mentors, coaches, pastoral supervisors spiritual directors remains central to formational conversation because of its essential generosity and kindness.

Boasting, bickering and bullying: conversation on digital media

Plato's Socratic conversations for formation:

- 1. the question prevails over the answer in all true inquiry***
- 2. true inquiry always provokes further inquiry***
- 3. true inquiry is always directed to the horizons - the interests, experience and character - of the actual inquirers.***

**we ourselves are the ones who
find ourselves addressed and
who are called upon to give an
account for what we are saying**

Ladauto Si, Pope Francis

When media and the digital world become omnipresent, their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously. In this context, the great sages of the past run the risk of going unheard amid the noise and distractions of an information overload. Efforts need to be made to help these media become sources of new cultural progress for humanity and not a threat to our deepest riches.

Online conversation has changed it in significant ways

1. personal conversations have become more public that cultivates *boasting*.

language is a call, an exchange. It is not true that language exists only to communicate information ... if we spoke only to convey information our relationships would be greatly impoverished (Jacques Ellul).

2. online conflict whose mood is constant *bickering*.

3. the destructive potential of cyber-*bullying*.

Intellectual, moral and character formation in the digital world

- 1. how might we effectively help people from different backgrounds to develop their practical ministry capacities?***
- 2. how can we identify key groups of people to work with in their local contexts?***
- 3. how can we do all this in a way that generates hope and a sense of possibility across the Church, and in the process attracts a wider pool of people wanting to serve the Church and world?***

Almost anything could become grist to Jesus' mill – personal or group failure, inappropriate ambition and conflict among his followers, the presence or appearance of small children, a prostitute or sick person; everyday objects and activities in the home, fields or countryside ... Jesus relied mostly on dialogue, not presentation ... He also encouraged nonformal learning (Mark 9:33-37), often when he was eating and drinking with his companions (Mark 14:17-21).

Robert Banks, *Re-envisioning Theological Education*

Here language is perfected as a sequence and becomes speech and reply. Only here does the word, formed in language, encounter its reply ... I and Thou do not only stand in a relationship but also in firm honesty. . . the moments of relation are joined here, and only here, through the element of language in which they are immersed. Here that which confronts us developed the full actuality of the Thou

Martin Buber

There is too much [information]. That is the first difficulty. The second one is that with the multiplication of information the things which are fundamental are drowned in a quantity of things which are not important.

Jacques Ellul

Intellectual, moral and spiritual maturity, requires patient and kind, generous and enduring relationships where conversations can negotiate conflict instead of the bickering and bullying characteristic of conflict online

All kinds of things rejoiced my soul in their company – to talk and laugh and to do each other kindness; to rend pleasant books together; to pass from lightest jesting to talk of deepest things and back again; to differ without rancour as a man might differ with himself; and when, most rarely, dissension arose, to find our normal agreement all the sweeter for it; to teach each other and to learn from each other; to be impatient for the return of the absent and to welcome them with joy on their homecoming; these and suchlike things, proceeding from our hearts as we gave affection and received it back, and shown by face, by voice, by the eyes, and by a thousand and other pleasing ways kindled a flame which fused our very souls together, and, of many, made us one.

Augustine, cited in *Celebrating Friendship: An Anthology*

I want to speak to the despisers of the body. I would not have them learn and teach differently, but merely say farewell to their own bodies – and thus become silent. ‘Body am I, and soul’ – thus speaks the child. And why should one not speak like children? But the awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body ... There is more wisdom in your body than in your deepest philosophy.

Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None.

Supervision (mentoring, coaching, spiritual directions) provides a safe space and critical conversations for reflection, growth, learning and formation