



Session 2 - Final Summary

May, 2019

Session Two Theme: *Personal Discernment, Laying the Foundation for Possibility Thinking and Communal Discernment*

The goal for this session was to explore personal discernment as the foundation of decision-making processes in communities and to continue strengthening relationships among the participants.

Three resources explored the theme from various perspectives:

Reflection on the Exercise of Authority, (2012 letter) Fr. Saverio Cannistra, OCD, Superior General
Video interview with Fr. Brian McDermott, SJ & Elizabeth McCabe (A written transcript of the interview was available as well)

Discernment of the Heart, Doris Klein, CSA

Supplemental resources included 2 articles (also available in video format) by Fr. Brian McDermott:
Intro. to Discernment of Spirits & Ignatian Guidelines for Individual Christian Decision-making

Session Statistics:

58 sisters participated in Session 2 from 11 communities of CCA

9 facilitators provided guidance in small group break-outs

9 facilitator feedback forms were returned

38 participant evaluation forms were completed

20 post-session feedback forms were completed

Session 2 Flow

As participants gathered on this Zoom conference call with enthusiasm, eager to reconnect and begin a discussion on the Session 2 materials.

Sr. Claire provided a welcome and opening prayer, sharing Judy Brown's poem **Fire**.

In a pre-recorded video format, five CCA communities shared for a 2- minute update about the current situation in their communities.

Elizabeth McCabe provided a 10 minute Input Talk (recording available on W@W Dialogues website).

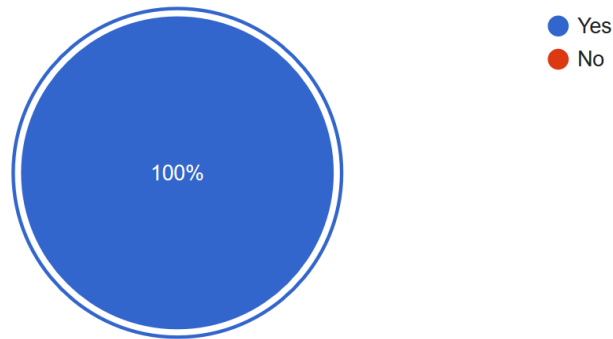
9 small groups met in Zoom break-out sessions, each with a facilitator for 45 minutes including a 5-minute break.

Elizabeth McCabe concluded the session recommending post-session activities to further internalize the discussions around Session 2 material.

Session 2 Evaluation Feedback Summary

Do you think the work of Personal Discernment aligns with Fr. Saverio's challenge to grow in "maturity and responsible freedom"?

38 responses

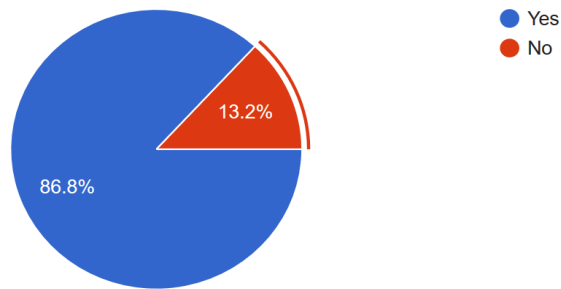


Summary of Comments on Fr. Saverio's July 2012 letter 23 responses

- We are not only being encouraged but we are being challenged to accept the responsibility that is ours for the governance of our monasteries. There are rights and responsibilities that come with being a chapter sister. To take seriously that role, personal discernment needs to be a life-long commitment so that healthy communal discernment can take place.
- His letter points out that we can't assume that people have the necessary skills to effectively participate in communal discernment. I think that the W@W program is trying to address this.
- It really highlights the sense of personal responsibility we each ought to have to do inner work that leads to maturity and inner freedom so that we can contribute to community
- This document is just as important today as when we first received it in 2012. Maturity and responsible freedom is ongoing not just as individuals but also as communities.
- He said very clearly 7 years ago what we all still need to hear and remember in our present reality; that God invites us and affirms us to grow into the persons we are called to be, so that we can freely be God's love for others and live our Carmelite vocation in wholeness.
- I thought it was very important and relevant that he made it clear that WE make the decisions in regard to our life and that each of us are called to "assume responsibility" in an "adult manner". I also think his call that EACH sister must carry an active role within community is essential
- I think it shows great trust in having us take responsibility for our future, and certainly a step in the right direction.

Did the video interview of Brian McDermott, SJ support or enhance your understanding of Personal Discernment?

38 responses

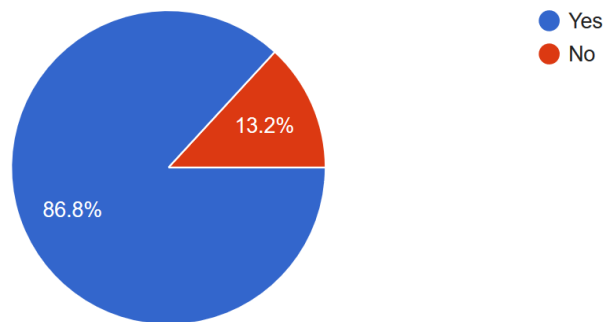


Comments on the video interview 19 responses

- I found the format of the interview more engaging than if it had just been a lecture. Great job, Elizabeth!
- I found the video to be more helpful to me than the transcript of the talk. I liked the interaction and contribution of Elizabeth with Brian, and somehow hearing him speak allowed what he was saying to go deeper into my heart.
- Having the transcript to follow along was a big help...the transcript was excellent and something to return to.
- Renewed and added to what I knew.
- Especially liked at the end when he pointed out the difference between the discernment that is needed by the "consultative" participant and the "decision" maker. This is very important in community discernment.
- Very fine, clear and very helpful. Loved it! His talk was easy and succinct.
- I found it to be a good description of the Ignatian discernment process; it gave helpful examples.
- Brian is such a superb teacher and humble, real person. That shines through in the video and enhances what he says very much. The questions and his explanations were very clear and helpful.
- It was similar to his other podcasts on discernment but with thoughts that were directly applicable to Carmelites and the process that CCA is undertaking. It was also very congruent with Saverio's letter.
- The interview was interesting but too long...hard to read and watch so much for this second session.
- Not as helpful as the other material as I had listened to a lot of Fr. Brian's videos in the past.
- The particulars of the interior process of individual discernment made clear the need for prior individual discernment in group discernment.
- I especially liked Elizabeth's questions and set a good direction. It was a good way to connect what Brian was saying with our reality

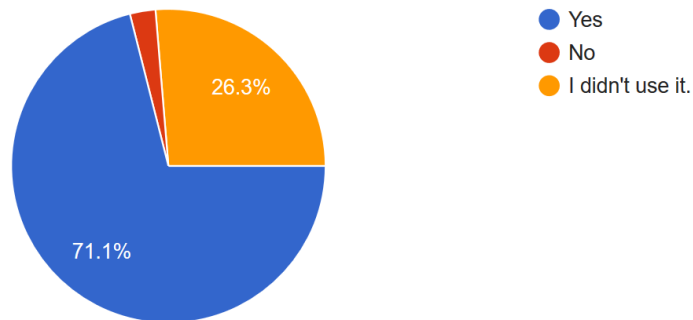
Did you like having a video as part of the Pre-Session material?

38 responses



Did you find the transcription of the video helpful?

38 responses



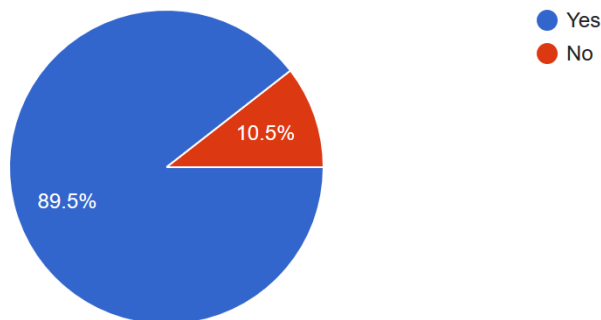
If you found the transcription helpful, please share why it was helpful

26 responses

- I like being able to go back to the material and reread points that I need to better learn or clarify.
- Greatly appreciated! Easier for me than watching the video all over again. I could write on it- think about it at my own pace. It makes it easy to look up a phrase later with "search"... easier to find a place on a printed page than in a video. **Several sisters made similar comments.**
- I am hearing impaired and the transcript helps me fill in what I miss when watching the video.
- Hearing and seeing at the same time helps me better retain the information. **Several sisters made similar comments.**
- To have the transcript and read it helped me very much to deepen my understanding of the topic because English is my second language. Thank you so much!

Did the article "Discernment of the Heart" by Doris Klein, CSA invite you to consider creative approaches to Personal Discernment?

38 responses



How did "Discernment of the Heart" inspire you? 27 responses

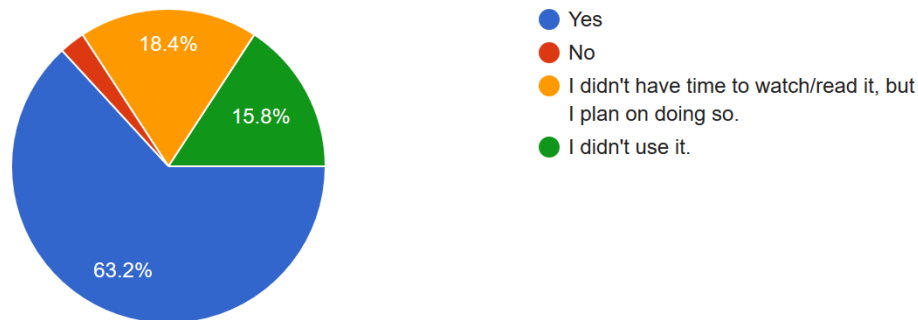
- Her feminine emphasis on intuition and knowing something from the heart was refreshing. This article was a wonderful complement to Brian's materials. It was good to have this on contrast to the Ignatian way. **Several sisters made similar comments.**

Insights

- I liked her sense that discernment can "clear a space" and that we are called to "relax into the pull of grace. The other concept that I particularly liked was her emphasis on non-dualistic thought and non judgement.
- Best of all was her emphasis on creativity... I feel freer to explore such creative approaches.
- By allowing me to consider ways that help me move into a contemplative space when living the day-by-day events of my life--and in encouraging me to find more ways that fit my life & personality.
- It was good to be reminded how nature, music and etc can create a space for interior journeying as feelings arise while experiencing God's creation. Also, the mention of "waiting" for God to respond through the leadings of the Holy Spirit.
- It offered an alternative pathway to discernment for me to consider; I typically do not operate out of that side of my brain...It was a good reminder to use both sides of the brain.
- The idea that discerning is not just sorting and finding the right facts but that once we have the facts we need to take time and listen to God. Discerning involves not only the head, but also the heart... I liked the feminine balance. The whole idea of creativity and intuition was wonderful
- To prioritize letting go into my intuitive self, especially with music and writing and just free time walking or running.
- It underlined the importance of listening and gave practical examples.
- A reminder of the many ways God speaks to us each day through nature, music, art...Looking with fresh eyes and open ears is very much a part of our discernment. Heart and head have to work together.
- It reminded me how valuable creative activities are in listening to God's word to me, how much I miss by not engaging in them.
- I think it is good to think of how the arts can open us up...music is particularly helpful to me
- It inspired me that our spiritual growth is like the beauty of opening flowers that grows their own freedom and make harmony with others.
- It makes the interior level of the process so meaningful - where we need to stand.

Did you find the Supplemental Material - "Seeking God's Will" and "Introduction to Discernment of Spirits" by Brian McDermott, SJ - helpful?

38 responses



Comments on the Supplemental Material 19 Responses

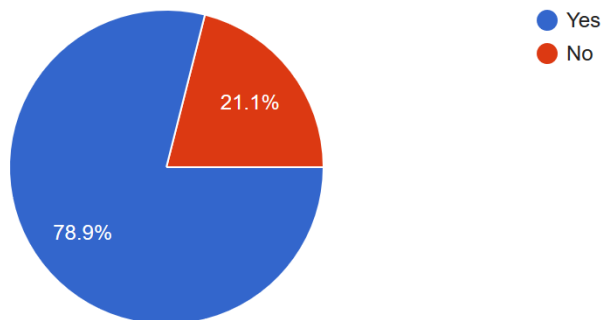
- It was excellent. Good resource. Wonderful. These were both very helpful. I especially appreciated the organized manner in which it was presented. **Several similar comments.**
- Very clear and supported the material offered on the video interview
- A good personal discernment can help a great deal when a communal discernment is called for.
- They go well with St. Teresa's account of her struggle with discernment in the Life, 30 (and other chapters). It blows my mind how much great work on discernment was done in 16th century Spain.
- I would be more interested in material that is less "masculine" in approach and encourages ways of engaging heart, mind and spirit.
- I had viewed them before **Several similar comments.** But, you know the motto in education: Three times for ordinary minds and the longer I live, the more 'ordinary' mine becomes....

We recognize that the topic of Personal Discernment is vast. As we continue to explore this topic, are there other resources that you've used that you would like to recommend to our CCA Communities? 11 responses

- Timothy Gallagher, OVM has at least 4 books on discernment including one on Examen of Consciousness that is quite good and very practical. Same author has written on Discernment of Spirits (2 volumes) I found them very clear and practical.
- de Caussade's *Abandonment to Divine Will* is good
- "*Contemplative Dialogue*" (Liz Sweeney) which we try to use fits well with Personal Discernment and Discernment of Spirits - really assumes these.
- "*Discernment*" by Rose Mary Doherty
- Consciousness Examen through the writings of **George Aschenbrenner** sj esp. his article in Rev. for Religious Jan.1972 or in other periodicals. It seemed as we talked that some were not familiar with the process of Examen in this form. It is informative that Ignatius told his little company that if necessary they could be exempted from their obligation of Mass, Liturgy of the Hours and their 2 hour contemplative prayer but they may never omit their Examen.

Did the reflection questions invite you to deeper insight on the theme of Personal Discernment?

38 responses

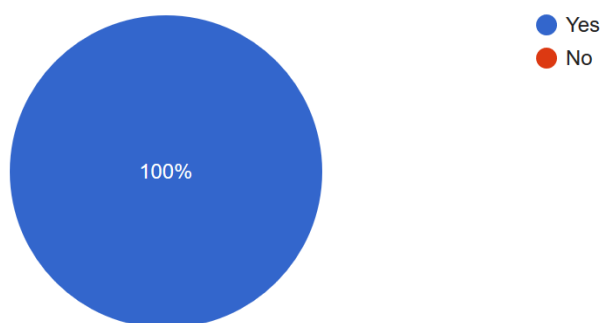


Comments on the Reflection Questions. 14 responses

- They were helpful to help me focus on the material... Always good for stirring one's thoughts and challenging one's responses... triggered reflection on the material.
- As an extrovert, I found the deeper insights in the group sharing, rather than in personal introspection.
- The two sets of reflection questions focused the group sharing.
- I am not sure it lead to deeper insight but it was a good way to frame my/our reflections so we had a common way to speak about them
- I thought that they were a good resource to have on hand for other times when personal and communal discernment need to be applied.
- It was nice to have them as a springboard but I felt free to mesh them into my responses.
- The personal reflection questions called for concrete answers (what behaviors, practices, habits...) and that deepened the reflection. They were directed toward growth in personal autonomy through prayer and living in community. Well thought out and presented. Thank you.

Did you enjoy the 2-minute video updates from several of our communities?

38 responses

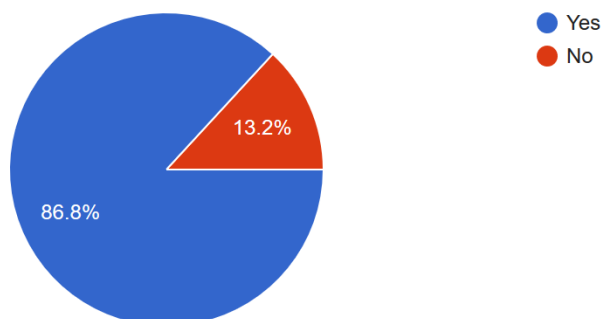


Comments about the 2-minute video updates 22 responses

- The sisters did a great job! I absolutely loved these videos and could tell a lot of thought went into them. What they shared was so interesting and they above all caught the spirit of each community. It was a 'fun' way to do this. **Similar comments from most as well as deep gratitude for the reports.**
- I liked the way each of the sisters did their presentations. And it brought me a bit closer to their communities.
- I enjoyed them but felt that a community update is what we offer in our CCA newsletter. I would have preferred the time to be used for small group sharing since the 45 minutes still didn't seem to be enough, for our group anyway.
- I found them much more creative than what we manage to share in the newsletter-- a home run
- I hope we can find a way to always have community update/comments as part of our experience
- Because we don't see each other often, I was glad to hear where other communities were in their lives and know, when I was in a small group with a member, where they might be coming from in their opinions.
- Excellent to hear and to connect us with one another in this unusual time of Carmelite life
- I applaud each sister for preparing her update (I know such presentations take hours to put together). Great idea!
- It was a wonderful way to be "with" our sister communities and discover more about who they are now and how they are moving into the future.
- Very creative, and heartwarming to hear from each one... Wonderful, I must admit Baltimore's was very creative.
- After hearing from all the communities - we may not need to repeat this again for awhile.

Did the Input Talk given by Elizabeth McCabe add to the information presented in the Pre-Session materials?

38 responses



Comments about the Input Talk 26 responses

- I think that her reference to 'possibility thinking' from session 1 was a good connector. I think that she can have an important role of tying the sessions together and helping us see the development of thought that you are trying to foster. I also think that she can help orient folks who have not attended the previous session.
- Maybe the talk could be a bridge to the next session. After the session we could get the transcript like we did this time and it could become part of the next session. It was very helpful.
- Re-emphasizing possibility thinking was good; I think many of us are still not quite ready to make that leap.

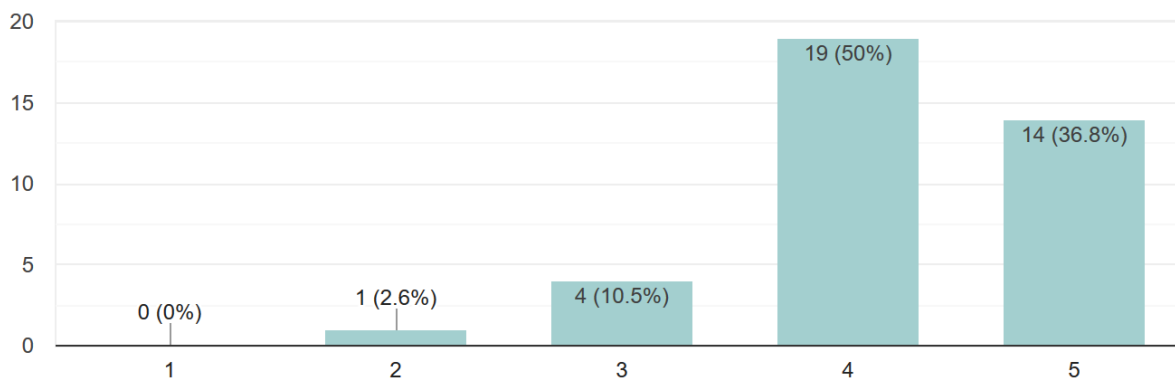
- It would be wonderful if a transcript of her talk can be made available as well. Easier for me to read something and have time to reflect. **Several made the same suggestion.**
- I'm feeling it's time to shorten the introductory input or even eliminate it in order to give more time for the small group sharing. **Several made the same suggestion (see below)**
- I did the preparation and was ready to go right into the small group sharing. The talk probably didn't add to the materials--there was already plenty of information in the materials.
- Good insights into discernment. It was hard to call upon the many good points she made in our small group sharing when we were hearing it for the first time and didn't have a copy to refer back to. **Several made the same comment in different words**
- **Combining comments:** Stimulating. Very helpful. Excellent. Great. Challenging. Insightful. Thankful for Elizabeth's extra effort to enhance our sharing and understanding.

New Insights gained from Elizabeth's talk:

- 1) Each of us need to ask ourselves where it is that God wants us to be now
- 2) Being in possession of my "self" is not self-centeredness.
- 3) Especially helpful: her distinction between individualism and individual discernment.
- 4) The idea of needing spaces of spaciousness to do inner work especially during times of change. Our communities always seem to complain about life being too full. Makes me think of what changes we may want to make in our community to allow for more 'space.'
- 5) We all hold a particular piece of life /of light.
- 6) It takes time and space to mine each person's wisdom and insight.
- 7) Discernment as a skill that needs to be practiced and improved.
- 8) The story from Jewish tradition really sparked something within me especially the concept "repairers and healers of the world"... that that was really a major part of my discernment years ago in asking to enter Carmel...
- 9) I really meditated on the anecdote from the Jewish tradition with which she began her talk. I thought it very apropos for our present situation.

Please rate your small group experience.

38 responses



Please share your feedback on your small group experience. Include anything that came from your small group that you feel was important or particularly insightful.

28 responses

Learnings:

1. Great value of the daily practice of Examen of consciousness and how it should be an important piece in formation.

2. We cannot name the resistances of others. We need to be cautious about projecting our own
3. Highlighted what Brian said in the interview about our 'default' places - and how important it is to be aware of what those places are for myself.
4. Personal discernment has consequences for the community and the quality of community life. But it is even more than that. It is about promoting the kingdom of God.
5. Ignatian discernment is a practical and precise way to support the inner work of self-knowledge, something St. Teresa refers to repeatedly in her writings as necessary to live an authentic contemplative life.
6. Making room for the ideas of others, especially when my own first reaction is negative, is crucial to discernment.
7. Be aware of the power of fear and resist it. Don't succumb to cold feet!

Questions

- We may discern that something is right for us. But it may not be right for the community. How do we reconcile discernment in that case?
- We veered into vocations and the discernment question: should we be proactive about vocation recruitment?
- There is a full range of appreciation [or lack thereof] for utilizing personal discernment tools. I think we cannot assume that all communities are open to it. I don't know if this translates into communities or nuns not using *any* processes to help with decision-making or just not using Ignatian discernment?

Suggestions

- I feel that 5 or 6 is the best number for the small groups. (I recognize the constraints of number of facilitators)
- Our time was definitely too short. I'd leave the break up to the small group.
- I would hope to keep our group for the next time.
- The flow of the discussion would probably have been smoother if we followed the suggested questions for small group sharing... Would help to have a little more focus for discussion
- The sharing needed more time. The break might not have been needed if we had gone more quickly to the small groups. A trust level needs time to build. A few minutes of silent time might be helpful.
- It's kind of hard to share on a deeper level with a different group each time - On the other hand - I loved the people in the first group and I loved the people in the second group - perhaps by the end I'll love all the people in all the groups. Maybe that the purpose of it after all –

Other

- I found the insights shared by the sisters in my group very helpful. Nice to actually dialogue with friends in other Carmels
- Every sister in my small group came prepared to speak for two mins. as we were asked to do. This got us off to an excellent start. **Repeated by others in different ways**
- I found my small group to be very helpful in thinking creatively about discernment and the things we read before having the ZOOM.
- Some seemed not having much time to reflect on topic, understandable, but we may need to put more effort into preparing for this great opportunity.
- I found that this format of small group reflection was better than the first one. There was less pressure on getting something into the expected report from the facilitator, and more freedom to exchange opinions and ideas.
- Our sharing was moving because it came from the heart of each sister and was sometimes quite personal. **Repeated by others in different ways**
- I think we are still in the "learning" process and will get better as time goes on and we get more at home with each other

Are there any suggestions you want to share with the Project team? 21 responses

Suggestions

- The articles we have been given for each session have been very good and helpful. However, I find them to be a bit dense or too much to take on for one session. In particular, this second session materials.... The material for Session 2 was quite lengthy
- I think you're wise to continue with discernment for the next session. We just scratched the surface.
- Reduce the readings and point the questions for sisters more specifically into the read or watched educational materials ... too much to read and watch in general
- Do you have an overall idea of where you are aiming with this project, or is it more fluid than that, developing in real time? Some sisters have expressed that they feel a "vagueness" about the process. Can you clarify in any way? It seems to me you are trying to offer tools to use to address our future individually and collectively.
- I think I would like to see something really stimulating in the input talk that complements or adds to the pre-session materials - either from the presenter of the pre-session materials or by another resource person. It might have been interesting, perhaps, to have Brian there.
- I suggest that you do what you did this time: setting up a starting place for the small groups.
- In an area where we are walking about in somewhat of a fog, any help is much appreciated. I pray for you that you will know what will help us to come to some conclusions or, at least, peace in the conflict. Thank you for all your efforts.
- 45 minutes is not enough time for us to share our initial comments and then dialogue together, but it was a little more time than our first session....More time in the small groups
- As the Sessions continue, it would be helpful for the facilitator to direct the conversation a bit toward the topic or the questions. Or is the focus more on the sharing among the sisters and whatever surfaces for each one? I am particularly thinking about this with reference to Possibility Thinking, if that is where we are headed in future sessions.
- I like the new format, happy with the longer time for small-group sharing. The materials were excellent and certainly invite further reflection & sharing.
- Give the option of suggestions for discussion instead of answering questions
- I think the break during the small group sharing can be optional.
- Assign a reflection question to each member of the small group to help the group stay focused.

Future Topics

- Will any of this be used to adapt our association to Cor Orans as well?
- How can we IMAGINE new models given our present realities?
- More on Possibility Thinking
- It would be good to have Fr. Saverio's 2012 letter as a focus for discussion sometime...particularly - initial and ongoing formation in the rights and responsibilities of membership in an autonomous community.
- Maybe next time there could be some input on obstacles to discernment.
- I was wondering if we can Share on Spirituality, Carmelite or otherwise and what helps Sisters live their Carmelite life.

Please share any additional feedback about Session 2 that you haven't shared elsewhere on this form. 16 responses

Suggestions

- The preparation materials seemed to me a bit too long. I didn't get to the video. Brian McDermott's articles were excellent, though. With Doris Klein's article, I think we would have had enough to inform our discussions.
- Maybe limiting the content a bit might help us be able to participate better
- All the adjustments you made were a big help: smaller groups, longer sharing time, no group reports. Thanks much!

Comments

- Sure is good to see and be with all the sisters, first of all and second, the spiritual and intellectual material is good as well
- I'm happy that individuals and smaller groups are meeting to further discuss the materials, in community / in focus groups / interest groups and such. The more we can reflect on the materials and this experience, the better for CCA as the association moves forward at this time in our history.
- Because of all that we are coping with at this time in community, and the fact that this came during Lent when our focus is elsewhere, it was difficult for me to get all the reading done in a reflective manner. I don't feel I did it justice, but since daily discernment is part of my life, I didn't feel unprepared for the session.
- I'm glad there was no small group reporting back to the larger.
- I felt the topic allowed for more personal conversations which I appreciated. Maybe also because of changes made regarding time etc...

Gratitude

- KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK! Thank you. Thank you. Thank you says it all!
- Getting everyone "there" is just amazing, Celia. A+! As we gather online all the years of work and growth and trust are so apparent. Consoling.
- Thanks to each one who prepared and participated in this session. LOOKING FORWARD TO SESSION 3 MY LOVE AND GRATEFUL PRAYER TO LT ,COMMITTEE AND OUR CARMELS
- Celia, Elizabeth, and Claire thank you so much for the great work you are doing. I found among you a lot of wisdom going on in putting all these together for us!! I appreciate it very much! The whole process: Reading, listening, praying with the text, and sharing has been very enriching for me!!
- Thank you, Elizabeth, Celia and Claire, for work and generosity!
- Thank you! You did a marvelous job. I am so grateful!! I am happy to know that the next session will continue this theme. Thank you very much for all your work and loving support. Very grateful. Thank you and praying you keep the spirit alive and welcoming its movement within - and we help along the way.