

Big Picture Conversations and Proposals

How do Big Picture Conversations differ from "proposals"?

"Big picture conversations" are really communal discernment opportunities. These are conversations that focus on "that which matters most" to a community, and about which there is a clear desire for more time to engage in meaningful and deeper dialogue. It is not about "building a case" for a proposed idea or project, but about naming and claiming **together** what is being revealed by the Spirit about the evolving future and to approach it in a contemplative and dialogic mode. The process of conversation around a "big picture" idea allows for a common entry point as a group - rather than "proposing" a topic that is of special concern to a particular element of the community, with all the pro's and con's, and to which the group is invited to "vote" yes or no. So it is a matter of "creating" together, as a whole, rather than responding to what has been created and proposed by a few. The HOW is as significant (if not more so) than the WHAT. As a more contemplative process is becoming more and more foundational to Chapters and Assemblies, these critical conversations take the place of proposals that were created within a former Chapter style.

The task is to name the two or three "big picture topics" upon which the community can agree – or have clearly surfaced in the midst of the on-going work of the community. This may need to be refined in such a way that it becomes something around which the community can together garner energy, engage in discernment and dialogue, and consider a desired outcome from each conversation. Some conversations may result in definite action plans and next steps. Others may simply point to a future direction that requires more work. Others may simply BE good conversations that create greater awareness.

Sample Question: As you consider your evolving future, what are the conversations you most want to have with each other? It could be like a sentence completion. As I consider who we are and what is being asked of us, as a congregation, I would most want to have a conversation about...

Depending on the size of the group gathering, invite a limited number of responses (no more than two or three) which will be collected so a list can be compiled which will be shared with the congregation. Usually, two or three focus areas/topics of this nature are chosen for conversation at a Chapter or Assembly. It does *provide direction* as a community considers who they want to be about together.

SAMPLES of Focus Areas:

One group with whom this process was used recently named as a conversation they most wanted to have was about prayer forms for private prayer...realizing the great diversity that existed among them. The intent was not to have everyone praying in the same, but rather to come to a greater understanding and appreciation of the diversity and then look at how that impacts common prayer. The hoped-for outcome did not involve creating actions plans, but simply greater understanding. Another group chose to have the conversation about what constitutes quality local community life and how that impacts the future. Other conversations could be more ministry focused.