

InDIALOGO

Bullettin n. 20 – September - October 2025



PROVINCIA AO

SUORE MISSIONARIE COMBONIANE

Dear readers,

We are on the threshold of our Inter-Chapter. This important landmark of our journey is framed within the Jubilee year, which fundamentally is a year of renewal and transformation. The Inter-Chapter offers all of us, “pilgrims” in the process of reconfiguration, a chance to break our journey in order to reflect on the last leg and discern whether we have to “recalculate” the route.

This issue focuses on how the understanding of mission as **dialogue provides a way to strengthen our journey towards the reconfiguration of the provinces.**

First section: The Dialogue of Knowledge. We look at the diverse ways in which various religious traditions understand the dialogue which God establishes with humanity.

Second section: The Dialogue of Spirituality. Starting from the intrinsic relation between Proclamation and Dialogue, we analyse how these two non-negotiable elements of mission have been present in the Combonian life and ministries throughout history.

Third section: The Dialogue of Life. We hear echoes of the journey of reconfiguration of some provinces. In our struggles, challenges, expectations and dreams, dialogue appears as the key element which equippes us to go beyond our comfort zones and cross any kind of barriers.

Happy reading!

The Commission



Dialogue of Knowledge

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How God enters in dialogue with humanity

by sr. Soloumta Hélène, SMC

The concept of dialogue between the divine and the human is a central theme in many religions, placing the accent on the God's active engagement with humanity and humanity's response. Man is a relational being, and communication is vital for him. Nonetheless, it is God who takes the initiative in communication. He initiates dialogue: *God loved us first*¹. In theological language, we speak of Revelation. Because the God in whom we believe manifests himself to humanity.



I- GOD SPEAKS AND ACTS

*God is a speaking mystery*². Man has to learn to pay attention to the signs of God. This requires attention to personal experience and to world events. Reflect on your own experiences, evaluating them in the light of faith and the Scriptures. It is not just a reflection on what is happening, but also an interpretation of these facts in faith. We are talking here about the signs of the times.

Indeed, not only does God give himself, but He also considers *human beings as a true partner*. In the Old Testament, it is the covenant that manifests this expectation of God,

¹ 1 John 4:19

² General idea of Walter Kasper's theology which emphasizes the revelation of God as a living mystery accessible in faith and love.

especially beginning with Abraham and particularly on Mount Sinai³, where God gives the people the Ten Commandments (ten words) as a means of remaining in communion with him.

Certainly, the Bible gives the impression that God speaks all the time. Communication for God is both, deed and word. When Jacob's descendants were oppressed in Egypt, God took the side of the oppressed people. Thus, God's action is not mythical but identifiable in a story. Sam Williamson said that God is always speaking, we've just never been taught how to recognize his voice amid the clamor. God's voice is everywhere in the Scripture, in the checkout line, in the job places, and even in silence. Believers are to *abide in Him* maintaining a continual conversation to foster an intimate relationship with Him. They are to be encouraged to experience God's presence and to live out the conversation with Him daily. God, also, speaks through other people and He can use us for others too. Still, God speaks to and through people today.

II- GOD'S COMMUNICATION IN SOME RELIGIONS

History shows a constant and ancient dialogue between different cultures and religions, where God is seen as acting through local manifestations and ancestral traditions. According to many religious traditions and theological perspectives, God communicates with traditional religions through revelations, symbols, rituals, and human experience of the divine.



³ Exodus 20

II.1 God dialogues in Christian religion

The originality of the God of the Bible is that He is a God of speech. **The Bible** itself is a dialogue between God and men; it is the speaking of God, who is himself the Word. God comes to meet human beings and enters into communication with them in an open dialogue. The great concern of God is to communicate himself to men, to give himself personally in order to establish an alliance: from the creation to Adam, and from the Prophets to Jesus, God reveals himself as a being in dialogue, constantly in relationship with men. Biblical accounts describe God speaking through a burning bush, a cloud, or a gentle breeze. They even describe natural or supernatural phenomena, making the divine word accessible to all humanity.



Jesus Christ: is considered the ultimate expression of God's dialogue with humanity. The incarnation, where God becomes human in the person of Jesus, is seen as the culmination of God's engagement with creation. "*After having, on many occasions and in many forms, spoken to the fathers by the prophets long ago, God, in these days, spoke to us through the Son*"⁴. And then, John in his beautiful prologue begins with these words: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh.*⁵

Jesus is the Word of God personified. "*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman.*"⁶

He got so close to us to talk to us better, to dialogue to us better, to discuss to us better, and to converse to us better, even in the sacraments of the Church, which never separate a humble human gesture from a word, but combine the two to form an act through which God acts and communicates with man.

⁴ Heb. 1:1-2

⁵ John 1: 1-3

⁶ Galatians 4:4

The dialogue between God and man is established at every moment through prayer. The practice of prayer, particularly in the context of a personal relationship, is seen as a form of dialogue. The Bible is therefore this sacred text, which bears witness to this dialogue. It is a collection of words from God addressed to men and women of all times.

II. 2 God dialogues with the believers of Islam

In Islam, Allah (God) communicates with believers primarily through written revelation (Quran), and through prophetic tradition (Sunna).



Indeed, the **Quran** is considered the literal word of Allah (God), revealed in its entirety to the Prophet Muhammad. It serves as a

guide for Muslims, providing them with instructions, laws, and stories that guide them in their relationship with Allah.

The **Sunnah**, which is the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, is another source through which Allah (God) communicates with Muslims. Then, there is also **as-Salat** (prayer), which is a daily moment when believers engage in direct dialogue with Allah.

Muslims are encouraged to contemplate creation as a sign of Allah's power and wisdom, and a form of indirect dialogue with the divine. And this dialogue with God in Islam is characterized by submission to Allah's will and recognition of his greatness.

II. 3 God dialogues with traditional African religions

In traditional African religions, the transcendence of God is very strong. A supreme and distant God. Dialogue with this divine being takes place through ancestors and spiritual forces. The dialogue between man and the gods is a constant activity: initiation, rites and symbols reveal the nature of the world and

the truth about spirits of the adepts. In the **forest**, there are spirits that symbolise the presence of the divine and enable a form of dialogue. For the idea of God as absent or distant rarely reflects direct contact with Him. And without intermediaries, it would be disrespectful, for He is so exalted.

Ancestors serve as a bridge between the world of the living and the world of the spirit. Rituals are specifically designed to communicate with the spiritual world and invoke divine powers through masks, statues, and totems (animals, birds, reptiles).

Dance and music are privileged means of achieving a state of union with the divine and celebrating life with ancestors and the cosmos. This is done by turning towards celestial bodies, mountains, plants or other natural elements symbolising dialogue with divine power.

II. 4 God dialogues with believers in Judaism

In Judaism, God communicates through various means, such as revelations. The most famous and central dialogue of God in Judaism is the revelation of the **Torah on Mount Sinai**. The Torah states that the entire Jewish nation heard God speak at Sinai, a claim that is accepted as part of their nation's history.



Studying the texts of the Torah and the **Tanakh** (the Hebrew Bible) is a fundamental way to understand God's word and connect with Him. Jewish rituals and festivals are opportunities for dialogue with the Divine, strengthening the bond between man and God through actions and symbols.

Divine dialogue can also be manifested through the example of justice and piety. This relationship involves mutual accountability, where believers commit to following divine commandments, thus establishing an active bond with God. Indeed, Jewish believers express their devotion and their search for a personal relationship with God on a daily basis. They must therefore devote at least one hour each day to talking with God

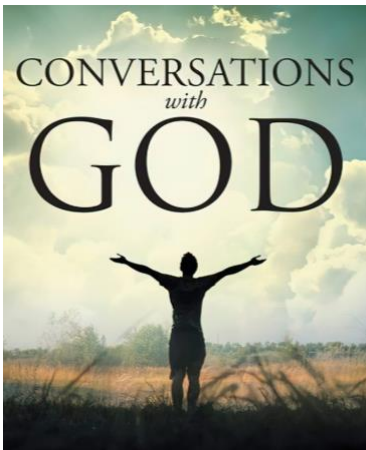
alone, in a room or in a field. **Hitbodedut** (התבודדות) consists of a personnel conversation with God.

II. 5 God communicates with believers in Hinduism

Hinduism believes that God is always listening, knowing the thoughts and intentions of believers. These believers can also communicate through rituals and pilgrimages to sacred sites such as the Ganges. And the dialogue with God (or gods) is established mainly through prayers (Prārthana), which can be mental (Mānasika), verbal (Vācika) or physical (Kāyika).

Even yoga develops the body and mind, with the ultimate goal of uniting with the supreme divinity. Daily rituals are important moments to connect with the gods.

In summary, let us say that this somewhat sloppy and quickly drawn-up work does not present all the realities in which God



dialogues with humanity. However, it shows that God is in constant dialogue with all believers. The longer one walks with God in faith, the deeper the connection and understanding of His thoughts can be. God's dialogue with humanity is multifaceted and ongoing, encompassing prophets, scriptures, prayer, creation, and the voices of others, as well as through the natural world and the

events of life.

Indeed, believers communicate with God as a living person who is deeply interested in their lives, and they are encouraged to keep this communication line open by reading and reflecting on His word. This dialogue involves more than just intellectual acknowledgement, it's an intimate, relational exchange with God.

DIALOGUE IN OUR COMBONIAN MISSION

By Sr. Laura Díaz Barco, cms



In the Combonian tradition, the understanding of **mission as dialogue** has been traditionally and mostly associated with countries of what today constitutes the Arab-Oriental

Province (PAO). What is more, there has been a historical struggle to embrace our presence in the Arab-Oriental world as “mission” in the strict sense. In the Combonian collective imagination, it used to be assumed that “real” missionary work was restricted to those geographical areas where “conversion” could take place. On the top of that, the unresolved tension between **proclamation and dialogue** existing in the documents of the Church has often led to regard these two concepts as mutually exclusive.

Proclamation and Dialogue intrinsically intertwined

Yet, the miracle which opened the road to Comboni’s canonization was the unexplained recovery of Lubana Abdel Aziz, a Muslim mother in Khartoum. **Proclamation and dialogue**, far from being at odds with each other, are intrinsically intertwined, as our long missionary experience has been showing us. On the one hand, **proclamation** does not and cannot occur without **dialogue** because we cannot announce the Risen Christ in a vacuum. **Dialogue** is essential not only to step in a new culture and learn a new language but also to weave relationships with people to whom the Gospel is to be

proclaimed. Our long history of missionary work attests a serious commitment in mastering local languages and learning local customs. Since Daniele Comboni and the first *Pie Madri della Nigrizia*, Comboni missionary sisters have strived to be immersed in people's daily lives and, as a result, our presence has made a positive impact in their existence.

On the other hand, in any form **dialogue** lies implicit the **proclamation** of one's identity: who we are, which are our core beliefs and Who moves our hearts. In *Ecclesiam Suam* (ES), Paul VI underlines that "**revelation [...] can be looked upon as dialogue**" (70). We engage in dialogue because God Himself, Who is dialogue, engages in dialogue with humanity through



Christ in the Holy Spirit. "In Christ's "conversation" with men, God reveals something of Himself, of the mystery of His own life, of His own unique essence and trinity of persons" (ES 70). That is why, Paul VI encourages us to "examine closely [God's relationship with humanity] if we want

to understand the relationship which **we**, the Church, **should establish and foster with the human race**" (71).

Today's mission: multidirectional and polyhedral

The missionary endeavour, especially in Asia, has enormously contributed to strengthen the Church's conviction that **proclamation and dialogue** belong together. Nowadays, the multidirectional and polyhedral character of mission challenges us, Comboni missionary sisters, to reflect on the relationship between **proclamation** and **dialogue** in order to enlighten our missionary choices in terms of presence, ministry, formation and spirituality. We cannot continue assuming that **proclamation** is

practised in one geographical area and **dialogue** in another. **Proclamation and dialogue** are an intrinsic and inseparable unit which cannot be severed but rather contextualized. Whether we speak of unbelief, the secular world, monotheistic religions, Eastern religious traditions, religious syncretism and witchcraft or other Christian churches, the “other” is very much present in all the realities where we are.

Finally, our long history of practising **proclamation and dialogue** in diverse contexts and cultures is a precious resource which could facilitate the process of amalgamation which the new configuration of provinces has brought about. The call to step out of our comfort zones and weave live-giving and lasting relationships is not something new to us. Moreover, this time we are destined to fare even better since we move in the common ground of our Combonian missionary vocation. The understanding of mission in dialogical terms enable us to see the other zones within our new reconfigured provinces as opportunities to expand our mental and geographical horizons, to learn from each other’s experiences and, most important, to see glimpses of the face of God revealed in the face of the “other”.

Let us allow the Holy Spirit to break the walls of our prejudices and fears so that we might really and truly recognize each other as Sisters in Christ on the footsteps of Saint Daniel Comboni.



DIALOGUE: a strength for the journey of CMS' reconfiguration

A Combonian Perspective

Echoes from the provinces

AMERICAN PROVINCE

By Sr. Sandra Regina Amado, cms

Dialogue in perspective: the Province of America on the path to reconfiguration

At the Aparecida Conference, in order to be more “outward-looking,” the Church needs constant dialogue to live its mission with authenticity and openness. The Church's mission must be lived with joy, social commitment, and openness to diversity. Dialogue is seen as a cross-cutting dimension of pastoral action, not only as a strategy, but as an expression of the Church's identity (Wolff 2008). In this context, dialogue is more than an attitude; it is an essential praxis for sharing the values of the Christian faith. Our intercultural community missionary presence in the American Church is to be a sign of hope and a courageous witness to this dialogue within the challenge of a reconfigured province.



To follow, reflect on, and embrace the guidelines of the LA Church is to adopt an attitude of dialogue at all levels of our missionary vocation in community and in the organisms of the Church. Pope Francis said that dialogue means respecting the path of others. The richness of cultures is valued and embraced through openness to dialogue. Cultivating dialogue is commitment to the option for the poor in the countries of the LA Church; walking alongside the ecclesial community, contributing our part in respectful and loving dialogue to create communion and

participation. It means consciously accepting that we do not have the answers, but are willing to reach out to encounter each other in dialogue.

Therefore, **dialogue** is essential in the **dream of reconfiguring as Province of America (PA)** precisely because of the challenge of creating communion. The language is of fundamental importance for deep listening and fruitful dialogue among us. Among the various ministries, ministerial circles have been created in which the sisters choose to participate. In addition to the challenge of the language chosen for communication, physical distance and often poor connection hinder dialogue, which becomes fragmented and sometimes disconnected. This can undermine the reconfiguration



process and serve as an obstacle to implementing reconfiguration based on dialogue. We must strive to maintain the choice of a common language to create a welcoming space for true communication. Only then can dialogue bear fruit.

Dialogue should be an integral part of the synodal process of the

LA Church; so, seeking to understand this process means promoting ongoing formation in listening among ourselves and with the ecclesial community. Our PA can benefit from the synodal process to exercise dialogue that strengthens communion and participation within the community and the Church. Through the process of reconfiguration, the PA is called to live the values of intercultural dialogue, joyfully witnessing to our missionary vocation. The attitude of dialogue bears witness to our missionary presence and requires us to be open, humble, and willing to learn from others. The reconfiguration will take time, as long as necessary until this true dialogue among us is established and strengthened. Our missionary presence in the LA Church depends on it.

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UNITED EUROPE PROVINCE

By Sr. Expedita Pérez León, cms



Which dialogue has been implemented among the zones to promote the reconfiguration of the province?

The questionnaires sent to all the communities and the Provincial Assembly were very helpful during the reconfiguration of our province, United Europe. The visit from the outgoing Provincial and her Council also gave us a better understanding of this process and a more positive outlook on it.

What are the attitudes we need to live in dialogue and what are the challenges you face in a mission understood as dialogue?

We believe that the following attitudes are essential for living in dialogue:

- ② Listening attentively
- ② Openness of heart and mind
- ② Being present
- ② Accepting differences

We may encounter these challenges as we live out our mission of dialogue:

- ② Becoming more open to sharing with different cultures and traditions
- ② Learning to see differences as a source of richness rather than a problem to be eliminated
- ② Being willing to welcome new ideas and ways of thinking, as well as being able to change our own ideas

How dialogue can strengthen more the process of reconfiguration?

Based on our experience, we feel we need more information about the progress of the reconfiguration process. Once the process begins, we receive very few updates, which is not helpful.

The more we share and listen to each other, the more aware we become of the new developments and benefits of this process and reality. If we all feel involved and jointly responsible, we will be more aware and open to the process itself.

We suggest continuing to consult individuals or institutions that have more experience and knowledge of these reconfiguration processes.



FRANCOPHONE PROVINCE

By sr. Anna Faggion, cms



Considering the question: **Which dialogue has been implemented among the zones to promote the reconfiguration of the province?**

I see that an important dialogue between the areas was made possible thanks to the work carried out by the CLR prior to unification, with the results of this work being shared during the provincial assemblies of each of the two provinces to be unified (COTBE and CTC). After the unification of the PAF province, attempts were made to establish dialogue through the Provincial and Provincial Council, with information sharing in the areas through the councillors, community superiors, seven ministerial commissions that brought together sisters from different areas working in the same ministries, written communications, the creation of a provincial WhatsApp group, and opportunities for exchange during provincial assemblies.

*My reflection continues with the question: **What are the attitudes we need to live in dialogue and what are the challenges you face in a mission understood as dialogue?***

- listening
- starting from the same shared values, evaluate different ways of living them, without imposing conformity to a single way.

- In the province, do not immediately seek definitive solutions or definitive answers. But know that we are on a journey, that we are building something new, which requires us to proceed gradually and also to accept possible mistakes, before arriving at common decisions that respond to the reality.

*Finally, wondering about: **How dialogue can strengthen more the process of reconfiguration?***

Dialogue can help us to live this process, knowing that we are building it together. It is an “ongoing” process, with each province, with all the sisters and the particular realities of the context, in communion with the other provinces of the congregation. If there is dialogue, we can support each other in our struggles and progress, without judgement or comparison.

ARAB-ORIENTAL PROVINCE

By sr. Yamileth Bolaños Barboza, cms



Dialogue: a key aspect for CMS' reconfiguration

I have always been touched by the great mystery of how God has entered into dialogue with all humanity, along all the ages and in different forms. The location of our Arabic-Oriental Province (PAO) is testimony of this dialogue and, in fact, it has been the cradle of the main religions. This divine dialogue which is intrinsic to God's nature, invites us CMS to grow in dialogue with Him, with the religions and cultures where we are present and with each other.

Now, that we are in this process of reconfiguration this divine invitation calls us to go beyond and deepen this attitude. Hence, we do realize that dialogue is a strength that can help us in this journey, so as to empower us in becoming more united in our daily living of our charism as Comboni Missionary Sisters.

Fostering mutual knowledge

The kind of dialogue that has been implemented in the PAO, in this process of reconfiguration, can be referred as a **mutual knowledge** that has helped us to enlarge our tents, knowing that we are not anymore enclosed in our zone but we have been called to open our hearts and minds to the reality of the other zones, Egypt, Sudan and MO, in particular and to the entire congregation in general.

We have been deepening our knowledge through **technological means** like WhatsApp groups, webinars in which we have get to know the reality of each community and its ministries in their local situations.

Likewise, the **formation of different commissions** (Social ministry, Education, Health, Evangelization and Missionary Animation, Formation and Dialogue) has foster specific forms of dialogue based on particular and relevant aspects of our charism.

Moreover, the **Provincial Assemblies**, have been forms of **dialogue**, both the zonal ones as well as the one done in Egypt that was for some sisters in person gathered from the different

zones, while the others joined online. The dialogue in the process of reconfiguration has been like an open window that has brought freshness and hope to our province.

Challenges

However, in the process of reconfiguration, we have also met some **challenges** regarding our mission understood as dialogue. First of all, the **dialogue online it is never the same as a dialogue face to face**, it doesn't express the totality of the person. Besides, the internet is not always available for all of us, leaving some communities cut off from what was being communicated. In addition, the limit of not knowing all the sisters personally and the places where they live and work, remain a big open gap for us.

Secondly, the **great diversity among the cultures, languages and style of presences in the different countries of our province PAO** is a reality that requires openness, flexibility, patience and a lot of communication skills in order to walk together.

Thirdly, **the role of the zone counsellors**, as a new figure, in relation with the Provincial Superior have not been always clear, creating some confusion and lack of clarity that does not contribute in a smooth dialogue between the sisters and the persons in leadership.

In this process we have confirm the fact that **we need to grow in a more circular kind of leadership, listening better** to the sisters of the grassroots and taking decisions together.

Subsidiarity and synodality as essential to reconfiguration

Finally, dialogue can strengthen the process of reconfiguration by living fully the principle of **subsidiarity and practicing Synodality** in our daily lives.

Subsidiarity is the principle of governance whereby the decisions and actions should be taken at the most local level possible, where local authority can handle the tasks, so as to avoid unnecessary recourse to higher authorities. At the local

In DIALOGUE level there are the local resources and can be used by taking responsibility. Subsidiarity as dialogue, needs to be reciprocal and it is based in mutual trust. In addition, when we live together, we discover our vulnerability, and it is in dialogue that



we come to terms to our own vulnerability and the one of the others. For this we need to grow in mutual respect as well as a profound listening among us.

On the other hand, dialogue is also essential and vital for the process of **Synodality**. The word: “Synod” refers to journeying together and in order to arrive to this, we need to listen to the Holy Spirit that guides us and help us to listen to ourselves and to each other. As a result of this, we attain what now is called the conversation in the Spirit that is a kind of spiritual dialogue that help us to look for and find together God’s will for us today.

East Africa Province

By Mary Kevin Sarah, cms

Dialogues and Reconfiguration process in East Africa Province

The zones in East African province have not got the chance to start dialogue among themselves because the provincial is new to the province and had responsibilities at general level. When she arrived in the province she preferred to visit all the communities of the province to have an idea of the province.



This ultimately will be followed by the inter-chapter assembly that is soon to begin. The province will have its assembly after the inter chapter and begin to walk the path together with the various ministries and programs. Despite this, the province had a deep process of dialogue before the full reconfiguration through the assemblies and media sharing. This helped us to know one another more and also to appreciate the efforts of each other.

The understanding of dialogue in this context is the process of a cooperative communication technique of reaching an understanding, establishing trust and getting to a resolution on themes and/or issues in question by encouraging respectful and attentive listening to different points of view. This for the case of East Africa province was done through various steps during the process of reconfiguration.

There was a local commission for reconfiguration formed that consisted of 2 persons per then province, charged with responsibility of bringing understanding and synergy among the three provinces for smooth process of reconfiguration. The team prepared the various documents from the main body of the documents used during the chapter of 2019 presentations for the sisters' deliberations on the patent questions for reconfiguration. The main issues were around establishment of the governance for the new province that is made up of 3 countries.

Leadership: The assemblies of the then 3 provinces were presented with basically 2 proposals for the number of councillors, the starting time lines for the new leadership and the method of election. They chose to go by the majority vote that gave one year of existence as independent provinces and then amalgamation, which officially took place on 25th March 2025. We have 2 councillors per country; one elected by the sisters of each country and the other nominated the by the elected council. This process involved all the sisters in the 3 countries through various dialogues.

The seat for the province: We also reflected on the seat of the new province where each former province gave their choice and the reasons for the choice. However, we are still waiting for the final answer from the new provincial administration.

Postulancy for the East Africa province. We deliberated on the Postulancy for the East Africa province. The proposal seconded were Langata, Lavington in Kenya, former Provincial House and former Novitiate in Uganda. The final choice went on Langata.

Ministries: Finally, there was a plan to connect ministries in transversal way in order to support and learn from one another. We started with knowing more about ministries present within the new province with some visual aid. There were videos made by all the communities within the province. Each sister presented her ministry in a short video presentation per community. This was shared with all the sisters and also used during the assemblies of 2024 for better understanding of the ministries.

Attitudes that promote dialogue

For a dialogue to occur, there must be some trust and openness to listen to one another among the parties involved. Openness is important because one needs to bring out the reality that is meant to be addressed. If it is hidden, then the dialogue will be false and futile. If there is no trust, there can be no openness on the issues. Among the sisters of the 3 zones, there needs to be a clear

stance of openness in the areas of management, formation, ministry, economy and community life. Active listening, empathy and patience are attitudes that set the stage for dialogue with a safe atmosphere.

Major challenges we face in dialogue

The biggest challenge in dialogue is when people come with preconceived ideas or results which gives no room for discussion. It blocks dialogue. Lack of trust and suspicion also does not give it a chance.

Sincere dialogue promotes acceptance of one another, collaboration and co-operation lead to development of the fullness of life. It will help the sisters to learn from one another as they share experience and knowledge. The modern technology enables us to communicate and share easily to a wide range of people through zoom or other media.

Dialogue could be termed as a discipline of collective learning and inquiry. It leads us to higher levels of consciousness which can bring creativity and effectiveness. Dialogue helps us to get group solutions not individual solutions which are very important for consensus.



