

The Convivencia

“They spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God.” (Acts 2:46-47)

Convivencia is a Spanish word, meaning ‘living together’ or ‘shared life’ (lit).

As a noun, it was applied to the medieval period when Jews, Christians & Muslims shared Spain. In the Manquehue Apostolic Movement (a Benedictine, lay movement in Chile) it is the name given to a special *lectio divina* group meeting which includes a shared meal and some time to deepen understanding on a particular theme. The idea behind this meeting is to give the group time to meet and share in a different way to the regular gathering.

There is a simple reason for meeting in this way: it extends the bonds of community life for the members of the group. The scriptural basis is also strong as we know from Acts of the Apostles. It gives dynamism to a group and helps it to grow and recognise the need for change and it gives energy and desire to achieve that change.

The basic format of a Convivencia may be as follows:

- Welcome, gathering
- Opening prayer
- Reflection/Introduction of material by the leader(s) – see below
- Period of Lectio Divina
- Shared meal
- Closing prayer (e.g. night prayer of the church after an evening meeting).

Preparation for a Convivencia

Spiritual requirements

Adequate preparation for a Convivencia by the group leader(s) is essential. Leaders and key organisers should meet at least a few days before the planned date.

This meeting, which should include its own time of contemplative listening to the Word, is aimed at reflecting on the progress (or journey) that the group has taken since the last Convivencia (or since starting up). Such reflection must be done in a spirit of prayer and humility, allowing God to guide the process through the power of the Holy Spirit.

For example, a group may have shown increasing signs of trust, openness in prayer, or it may have been under spiritual attack (e.g. members prevented from attending due to illness, work and family crises [which only occur on the day of the regular meeting]).

From these reflections, a “theme” should emerge. This could be anything from a need for increased pastoral care to a celebration of growth within the group or a need to find more stillness and peace (cf. Holy Space). This in turn will result in the selection of a passage(s) of scripture for the lectio divina during the Convivencia. The leaders should discern and select the scriptural passage with care, taking into account the needs of the whole group and not just their own needs. This passage would replace the ‘regular text’ for the meeting.

The Convivencia (cont'd)

Practical considerations

In addition to the spiritual preparation, attention should also be given to the preparation of the shared meal.

Perhaps all those attending the Convivencia could be encouraged to bring something to contribute to the meal or, if the group is large, then over a series of Convivencias everyone could take part in the preparation of the meals.

Alternatively a small team might work together to prepare the meal.

Frequency of Convivencia

Ideally a convivencia could 'complete' a recognisable chapter in a group's life or celebrate a specific feast or event. In a group where family considerations are strong then three or four in a year might be the maximum possible.

Young adults might be able to do more.

The following occasions are suggested:

On Holy Thursday night after the liturgy of the Lord's Supper

Meet to wash each others feet

Early in Eastertide (to celebrate Easter)

Reflect on the spiritual journey from Christmas to Easter

Look ahead to Pentecost

Early summer (e.g. July)

Reflect on Eastertide, Pentecost and the return to Ordinary time

Look ahead to the next phase of the cycle of readings

Late summer / early autumn

Reflect on ordinary time (and summer holidays)

Look ahead to the next phase of the cycle of readings

During Advent (to celebrate the beginning of the new Liturgical Year and Christmas)

Reflect on the Liturgical year just ended.

Look ahead to Christmastide