Conversations with Br. Philip Pinto, cfc
May 12th, 2020 Webinar
Webinars based on the 2019 Supplement to the 2014 Formation Guidelines

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Transcript from the Recording
(I began recording about 5 minutes into the session)

(Slide) Opening Image: Emmaus Story.

(Slide) Brother commented on the Slide from our Formation Document.

As we open ourselves to the new stories and new metaphors and paradigms that are emerging the experience that shifts in our consciousness. A call to a new way of being. Radically contemplative prophetic. Women drawn by love passionate for justice. How much we have spoken about these shifts in consciousness. May I ask here, and say to yourself: “What are the shifts that have taken place in my own consciousness in the last five years? Can I make a list of these?” It might be a good exercise and sometimes when we gather for prayer to put everything aside and just stay with these shifts. Can we share these shifts in our consciousness with our sisters? Because when we share we make them real. When you verbalize something you bring it to your awareness. More and more, I believe this is the way we are being invited to pray.

(Slide) This picture reveals one that I saw almost every morning when I went to Mass in Rome at the Church of Santa Maria del Popolo: The conversion of Paul by Caravaggio. You and I know that the conversion of St. Paul was not from a life of wickedness to a life of grace. He was a good man. His whole world was turned upside down. And that is what happens to us. There are huge shifts taking place in our world. If my understanding of God today is the same as it was five years ago. I'm in a spiritual rut. I'm in relationship with an idol. My life is constantly inviting me to shift to change, to grow.

Again, I want to place this before you. Many of you would have known this. It is called the 3 “Rs”. You will find this very helpful in your own life, your own response and your reaction. Here they are:

- The first is Resonance. What part of what you have heard rings true? From your own experience and affirms what you know to be true. So, I'll be seeing certain things and you say yes. I know that. I agree with that. There is Resonance. Easy to remember to recognize.

- The second one is Resistance. Is there a conflict between what you have heard and what you think is true? Is it there something that you don't want to hear here?
Something that grates against your normal way of viewing things. Is it there something that makes you want to dig in your heels or turn away? It annoys you. Pay attention to that. And ask yourself what is it happening? Why am I being upset? Was it what is there that I don't want to hear?

- And finally – **Realignment.** As a result of what you have heard has something shifted within you?. What has shifted? What is different? What challenges you or goals for a change in the way you live?

So, as I'm talking pay attention to these. You might jot down certain things. Yes, there is fear. Yes, there is sadness, yes, there is panic. Yes, there is sickness. Yes, there is even death. They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise you can hear the birds. They say that after three weeks the sky is no longer thick with fumes but blue. They say that in the Streets of Assisi people are singing to each other, keeping their windows open so that those who are alone may hear the sounds of people. In the west of Ireland people are offering free meals and delivery to the housebound. Today a young woman I know is busy spreading flyers with her number, through the neighborhood, so that the elders may have someone to call on. Today all over the world synagogues, mosques, and temples are preparing to welcome and house the homeless, the sick and the weary. All over the world people are slowing down, all over the world people are looking at their neighbors in a new way. All over the world people are waking up to a new reality: who we really are. How little control we really have to what really matters. And we remember that yes, there is fear, but there does not have to be hate. Yes, there is isolation, but there does not have to be loneliness. Yes, there is panic, but there does not have to be meanness. Yes, there is sickness, but there does not have to be disease of the soul. Yes there is even death, but there can always be a rebirth of love. Wake to the choices you may be asked to make now, to live now. Today breathe, Listen. Behind the factory noises of your panic the birds are singing again . The sky is clearing, spring is coming and we are always encompassed by love. Open the windows of your soul. And though you may not be able to touch across the empty square, some of you would have heard and seen that, but I thought it was worth repeating. It is a picture of what is happening behind the scenes.

And so I come again to the Emmaus Story – the stranger in our midst. The story has so much to teach us about what it is happening to us as a human community on planet Earth. It baffles us. The totally unexpected stranger has entered our midst on our individual and communal journeys these past few months. This stranger has come along, shown us our lives, and is trying to teach us that there is another way of living Life and so I just want to point out to you some of the things that are happening. You foolish ones so slow to believe the full message of the prophets. My sisters and friends. Just look at the number of messages we have been getting. I'm going to show you a few in pictorial form. (Slides) Messages all the time reminding us of what we are doing to our planet. We are destroying the life that has been given to us. The beauty that has been showered on us. We are wasting it. We are destroying it. In fifty years from now they are going to be sizable portions of our planet that will be too hot to inhabit. We saw the fires, the bush fires, the forest fires taking place in Australia, Indonesia, California. We say that's far away. Nothing
changes in the way we live because of that. The tsunami, pollution, the destruction by
tornadoes and typhoons. All these messages coming to us from our planet. But we're not
listening. These are the prophetic voices speaking to us. The violence that fills our world
– endless Wars. Hunger. Refugees, fleeing and finding borders closed to them. We see
the inequality – the Highrise Buildings next to the slums.

We see the poverty. And we see time again the terrible hunger. And this in the 21st. And
these are the voices, in our time, crying out to us. But we're not listening. And then most
recently the different televised Masses. You have that iconic picture of Pope Francis
delivering His Urbi et Orbi Easter message a lone figure in Saint Peters. And then the
empty churches. Are we listening to what is it going on? Can we see that? We're not
paying attention to our world. To what's going on, can we see that in our world. I get a lot
of Catholic social media across my desk, and I am horrified to see the amount of attention
that this media gives and focusing on different ways of praying. Different ways of
ritualizing our usual Mass. Amount of time being spent on that as if the only way we can
be Christian is that. There is no call, mass call. No mass call. Some isolated voices do it,
but no mass calling saying to us: “Look at what's happening to the marginalized and the
poor”. It's up to small little group to do that. There is plenty of warning from many countries
especially developing countries, developed countries around the world of empty
churches. Many examples of that: Monasteries are closing, Seminaries are empty and all
we say is that the spirit of secularism has captured us. We have no more faith. Can we
not see that this is an invitation being offered to us, as Church, to try to be Christian in a
different way?. The emptiness of our Churches is telling us to search in different places
for the Sacred. There's so much about converting the world, so little of converting
ourselves.

I think there's a need, a radical need, to move from a static being Christian, to a dynamic
being Christian. Just before his election as Pope, Cardinal Bergoglio spoke to the
Cardinals who elected him with this text from Revelations: “Behold I stand before you
and knock”. And he posed the question: “Is Jesus knocking to come in or does He want
to get out?. Is He suffocated by our creeds, by our dogmas, by our pettiness, by our small
god?”

And at Easter that we just celebrated when we saw the empty churches. Did we identify
them with the empty tomb? The one you see is not here, He is risen. You will find him in
Galilee, He has gone before you into Galilee. I believe that we have to look at the Galilees
of our lives. Where are the Galilees of our lives today? Jesus did not try to squeeze the
lost sheep of the house of good Israel back into the structures of the Judaism of His time.
He kept reminding us: New wine in new wineskins. We will not find the new wine in the
old structures. And you and I as religious have that supreme duty of keeping alive the
dangerous memory of Jesus. Of keeping alive the passionate and subversiveness of the
Gospel. And if we do not do it all of us suffer. You are invited to seek a new identity for
Christianity in a world that is being radically transformed before our very eyes.

I want you to take a few moments, please. I have been talking. There's nothing new in
the last two slides.
The question I'm asking is:

- Why have we not paid attention to what has been happening in our world? What has long been right before our eyes?
- Why am I not paying attention? Why am I carrying on as always in spite of these stark warnings?
- Does the living of my Christian life, Religious life tend to shield me from the reality of the world? Why?

Just spend a few moments in quiet. Please.

Suggestions: Three times a week. Talking about what's going on and trying to understand the different points of view. And pass around articles written about this. Because people are thinking and we need to be aware of this new thinking that's going on.

I'll go fairly quickly through this. Do all systems and lifestyles, now, seem to mock us? How wasteful we have been. The Pandemic is showing us so clearly the result of the folly of our actions. We're seeing inequality, we're seeing the people who are suffering. The ones we take for granted, the ones who keep our cities going. The other ones struggling in the lockdown. Their means of livelihood has been taken away. And then our poor planet within weeks of human slowing down then stopping. We are seeing life regenerating. I saw this picture. Of Italy. 10 days difference the middle of March and the end of March. See what it was and see what it is now.

There's a huge difference taking place. We're also recognizing the way we are able to adapt. The way we are able to come together. How creative we are in dealing with difficulties. And the futures up to us. Don't look for a God today to come to rescue us. It won't happen. No matter how many miraculous statues or pictures we pray before or how many televised masses we watch.

There is no God from outside going to come to help us. Christ has no hands but yours. That's what you have to look at. It's up to us and it's up to us together to do it. We're seeing the worst and the best of humanity. You see the panic buying, you see the hoarding. You see some of the hate crimes that are going on. But more than that I see the compassion and caring and global solidarity. It's as if God were saying again: “I place before you life and death, chose Life. So that you and your children may live”.

The pandemic is an opportunity for us to become the best of who we can be. We are using the terminology of war. “We are going to win this war, we are going to defeat the enemy.”

Let me tell you the enemy's not the virus. The enemy is ourselves. It is our greed, our violence against nature that has brought about this catastrophe. What are we learning? It's the enemy within.
It’s a goal to wake up. Who will we be now? How will we be now? When this threat subsides will it be back to business as usual? Or will we make changes and choices? So that. Our planet is cared for and our relationships are cared for. And our poor are cared for. Don’t wait for it to be over. Plan Now.

I’d like to finish this section with these next two or three slides. Some of you might have seen this. It's called “love in action”. When you go out and see the empty streets, the empty stadiums and the empty train platforms don't say to yourself: “It is the end of the world”. What you’re seeing is love in action.

The very fact that we are not going out we are showing our love for one another. We're hinking of the other person. I'm saying “I've got to watch my behavior, because I love those people”. And families do that. Communities do that. We are making certain that our behavior is proper. When we go out how careful we are and that is because we don't want those living with us to be infected and affected by this pandemic. We want to protect them. That's love in action. What you're seeing in that negative space is how much we care for each other. For people we will never meet. Look at that social distancing. And when I meet people who are against it I'm seeing those are the selfish people. Thank God they are in the minority. The rest are observing the rules and taking care and keeping their place and their cities safe.

(A sister made a statement at this point). Thank you. That's good. People will lose jobs over this. And some will lose their businesses. That's why when you go out on your walk, you go to the store or you watch the news. Look at the way people are acting and marvel at all that love. We never saw that before. What we are looking at, at the moment, is one of the most remarkable actions of global solidarity we may ever witness. This is not the end of the world. This is the beginning of a new solidarity. This is what it means to be human. This is how the human race was meant to live and relate. Future generations, if there is a livable world for them, will look at this time of transition and they may well call this “the time of the great turning”. The time of the great shift when things moved differently.

I think that Jesus would have been thrilled- Because a shift notice down in that picture in red (referring to a slide) The shift in consciousness. That's what brings about the great turning. No more selfishness. Move ourselves away from the center and allow others to come into the center of our lives. Think of others. This is the whole Jesus message.

So here again I am going to invite you. Take a few moments in quiet. And ask:

“So, what is striking for you? And what is disturbing you? And what do you want to keep reflecting on?” So that when you finish from here you want to say, “I'm going to think about this a little more.”

So very briefly for a few moments. Just spend time again in silence with yourself. I think I have been speaking around 40 minutes. So, should we take a break and open up for questions?
Question and Answer Session: May 12th

1. Question: Say more about the enemy within

It is really seeking a clarification asking me to say something more on the enemy within. It is in the context of looking at this pandemic that is taken us all by storm. And recognizing that. This pandemic has come about as a result of human actions. It is our inability to recognize the rights of others, creatures as well. If as they say this Corona virus has come about from animals, they mentioned bats and if that is true, and it is also coming out of some of what is known as the wet markets, where live animals are exchanged and sold. The bats give out a certain aura, a certain scent because of their fear. Normally their temperatures are higher than ours but they can manage that and when they're active they can manage that heat and it doesn't cause any danger. But when they're scared and when they're disturbed and when they are captured and imprisoned what happens at that stage has the potential to harm us as well. But apart from that it's our whole attitude to other creatures. We are not aware, we may be aware at one level but in our lived experience we're not aware that we are sharing this planet with other species. I think when I speak about the enemy within: it is our attitudes, our exploitation, our wastefulness, our attitudes of over consumption that are causing what's happening in our world today, so the enemy is within us, it is not outside us. Okay.

2. Question is it there a role for the re-emergence of the household church in these tough times without the use of tough technology?

From what I'm reading, I believe there is, I believe there is, but how it's going to happen I don't know. It's not going to happen on its own. Just listen to what Pope Francis is saying to us time and time again. He is inviting us to be a less clerical sort of church. And when I say "clerical" I am not being critical and not speaking only about priests here, we can all be clerical in our attitudes. Pope Francis says clerical takes place when I think I'm entitled to certain privileges because of who I am. So, if you want a household church, can we have a household church? Where the rules are distributed according to giftedness? Allowing the community to call forth the leaders. But yes, I believe that it's one of the ways in which we can. A new way of being church. Around the social distancing. And yet we need to be touched. Absolutely right, absolutely right and this social distancing is out of love. How much we need each other. How much we want to hold each other. I think women are better at it than men. Just until a short while back. The only way whenever we met, would be shake hands. Now, more recently, when we come together there's a lot of embracing that goes on. Even in liturgies and rituals there is much more embracing than before and that's a healthy sign. So, I agree with you. I would also hope that social distancing doesn't last. However at this moment the way we show our love for each other is by social distancing. Knowing that it's one way we can keep safe and keep the other save. As you so rightly say it is contradictory and you are very right to think that way.
3. **Question:** I agree with Benedict is it not the re-correction of nature due to human creed? There was definitely human greed discovered over here.

Definitely. I'm not too sure if I understand correctly what you mean by re-correction? A sister asks me to explain more about the mass call. Yeah, even when I was talking. I was aware that when I use the word mass meaning all of us together, great number of us together you may be thinking about Holy Mass. It wasn't Holy Mass. It is a call of everyone. Very good question over here. Is there a risk that people might turn their backs on God and drew humanitarian work and think that is spirituality in action. Maybe it is just a strong belief in themselves and their ability to serve. How do we find a balance? Very good. I'm thinking about a social activist, that I was speaking to recently and he said: “I am an Atheist. I'm an atheist. I don't believe in God. But I'm a spiritual atheist”, I will tell you why. He was a social activist. He's out there putting his life at risk speaking about the rights of people. But he says: “I'm not doing this hoping that I'll be rewarded with heaven. Nor am I doing this because I'm afraid if I don't do it, I'll go to hell. I'm not looking for a reward. I'm doing this because I believe that this is what it means to be human. That is what I call trying to be fully human. So many times we bring God into the picture. It's almost like a spiritual band-aid that comes in. Since we're here talking about formation. Look at the number of times. Well it used to be done, I do not know if it is still being done. Can you identify with this?

When a person is going through difficulties and so on and we ask them to spend time in prayer and that God will take care of their problems. To me, that's a false religion. When the mystics said to us that Christ has no hands but ours no feet but ours. You are the voice through which Christ speaks to the world. You're the heart through which Christ loves the world. The mystics were telling us the only way in which God can intervene in this world is through other humans”. And I'll say a little more about that in the next talk that I will be giving. But. False religiosity, and I agree with the writer here. You know, it's not just doing it to be a humanitarian. But I also know that deep down. When I'm fully human I am Divine. I touch into divinity. That can be a bit upsetting for some people? But it sounds theologically. And you had theologians of the fourth century. Eastern Church, that was speaking about this. When they would say that God became human to have us become Divine. Not just Jesus you and me as well.

4. **Question:** Watching a Mass on Television? Is it wrong? I don't think it's wrong..

Why am I watching. I never watch it but then I am not the norm, neither am I the example. So it does not mean that it is right or wrong. My thing is the whole point of the Eucharist is as a community. It's breaking the word and breaking the bread. It's committing myself to be a Jesus person do this in memory of me. This is not a participated Mass. It's not to be a participant or an observer or someone else is up there and you're taking part in that, there is no magic in religion. There are times we make it magic. There is no magic in it. Rather than have mass on television. Why not have the community gather around bread and wine? Gather around the word God. And speak about what's happening in their lives around the word of God. And as a sign of committing themselves to each other. Break the bread and drink the wine. When I go to Mass I remind myself I'm not just receiving
something, I am committing myself to something, I am committing my body to be broken and my blood to be poured for those celebrating with me. So, I'm not saying watching Mass is right or it's wrong. It is one way of doing it. But we have become slaves to one way only. And we have a rich tradition in our church, but unfortunately in the last couple of hundred years we have become a mono worshipping group.

5. Question: A certain person who says speaking about the shifts we have to reorganize many things. Given our situation and the structures of our institutions, how can we respond to the new invitations? Any suggestion?

You should ask my brothers about this. I start with the simplest of all suggestions. Don't look at huge changes. Look at your own community and if you're looking at structures ask yourself what structure do we have that is really an obstacle to our way of life? The new way of life.

What are we speaking about? And let me tell you once you start looking at it, you'll find them. What did you write at the beginning? To say to you this document that you have that came out to help you with your formation document that is not just for the other sisters, the younger ones coming in the new ones it's for all of us. It's for all of us. Because the younger ones and the new ones are not going to get much out of the document as out of the Lived example of their sisters. So just simple things and keep an eye on that question, but simple things like this: The universe story. What has shifted in the structures in my Congregation as a result of the universe story? My following the universe story. When I believe in an old, very hierarchical universe a three-tiered universe a static universe. The structures were there. And the laws were written for that time. And the laws were given to us as unchanging. And very often we would say our founder or our founders gave us this you cannot touch it. But my founder never knew the universe story. My founder never knew an evolving ongoing developing universe. He came out of a static three-tiered universe. His God dwelt in heaven. Our father who is in heaven. But because he was a mystic he would have recognized that God is not just in heaven wherever that is. But he wouldn't have spoken about it. But you and I can speak about it because we are facing the reality. Scientists are telling us we are living in a new world. So, for me, when my community comes together and they talk about living in a new world, and they look at the structures and they ask which sort of structures will be helpful in this sort of a Universe. Simple structures like how are we going to pray now. I will say something about prayer when in the next session. But to me, it's looking that way at your life. What is blocking me from moving in this new paradigm? And leadership has to be hugely open. Hugely open.

6. Question: A statement here lovely. A profound call to be prophetic in these times.

Spot on. The great gift that we need today is imagination. Walter Brueggermann wrote a book on the prophetic imagination. To be prophetic you need to be imaginative. Because you're going to be subversive. And you will be subversive in a way that is gentle. The Prophet is non-violent. That's how you know the prophet. I agree with you.
7. **Question: Over here is a very real question: not all of us are on the same page.**

So right sister, so right and that is the struggle. I believe that as we share with one another we are not trying to convert one another. The spirit does a conversion. We just share our truth. And let it go. And the other person shares her truth. But we listened. At the beginning I spoke about generative conversations, generative dialogue. Religious Congregations are trying that and I know we are trying that also. And it's torture. I have to keep saying you're not listening you're not listening. If you are trying to find an argument, that's not listening. So, I believe that. It is the journey, it's a process it will take time.

**Conclusion**

Sisters. I thank you so much for your questions. There are so many more that are over there, they'll be sent on to me as I prepare for the next ones, but we'll are out of time and I just wanted to Thank You.