

+18 Workshop – Exploring the Essential

Manantial del Corazon, 28. April – 1. May 2017



By the workshop staff Carlos, Stefan and Ruben

Contemplating our lives as how they are, with all their cracks and imperfections, doesn't mean that we give up on ideals. Rather, it means cultivating compassion and forgiveness in all places. This may be the most important conclusion that the Spanish community achieved together during one of our biggest youth gatherings. Around thirty

participants were present, including babies and kids.

It is not always easy to talk about some topics in our lives. We've built our identity based on our ideals. This gives us a bigger picture of where we want to be, but this can also bring a lot of suffering to those who couldn't make it along the way. Difficulties along the path of faith, challenges that the Blessing inevitably brings, facing our limitations as communities – we've

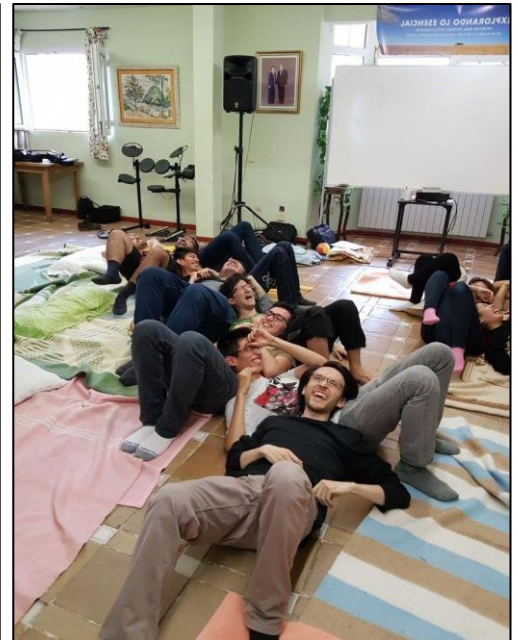
found how important it is to talk about these things as part of an ongoing community conversation.

During this two-day workshop, there weren't lectures in the traditional form. Instead, we listened to twelve short presentations and heartfelt testimonies from people of different ages and circumstances, ranging from 18 to 33 years old: singles, blessed couples, broken blessing singles, people very involved in their local communities, and people disengaged from their communities for many years.

We were given an opportunity for an emotional exercise, known as Emotion and Laughter Therapy, facilitated by Luisa Lozano, a sister from our community. This exercise helped bring a more open and trustworthy atmosphere to a workshop which held a wide range of ages and interests.

In addition, we dedicated a lot of time to discussion in small groups. We asked ourselves twenty-nine questions, trying to figure out what remains in our lives in the end, ranging from: *What do we take for granted in our lives? How do we make sense of our faith, if it still exists, after a long and broken Blessing, and what lessons did we take from failure? What made our Blessing last longer, how did we overcome the obstacles, how did we experience it?*





What are we grateful for in our church community, and how do we want it to be different in the future? What are the taboos of our community?

Later, we talked about our answers to these questions in the bigger group and drew up conclusions. As it turns out, we realized that we share the same difficulties because we are all human beings. Then, to end each session, we asked everyone to anonymously write a heartfelt prayer and blessing on the topics of life, family and Blessing, and community.

Some of these blessings were:

May I make others happy, may I forgive myself of my past mistakes, begin again, and be the person who I really want to be in the future. May we live our lives as a great journey during which we can always learn and make our hearts bigger.

May there always be respect, trust, joy, and unity in our Blessings and families. May we always remember the love and purpose that brought us together. May we always understand one another and

not let worries and fear overwhelm our relationships. May our love be strong to overcome all obstacles. May our love for God be in the midst of us.

May our community be a great big family. May there be more communication, understanding, respect, and unity. May it thrive. May it keep growing spiritually to offer more to society. May it be more open, both on the inside and outside. May we not feel the need to judge each other. May we create a community which can be diverse and spiritually healthy, where people can be honest, love, and grow together.

Maybe there was another essential lesson we were taught about in this gathering. A lesson about how powerful community can be when we are all open to listen deeply, understand before judging, and feel free to become vulnerable, trust each other, and find hope. As Anne Lamott said, “hope is a conversation.”

We realized that our strength as a community will not come from clear

structures, strong leadership, or through merely increasing our membership numbers. Rather, it will come from our capacity to hold conversations like we had during this workshop, to listen and to be listened to, to heal our wounds, to see hope in the midst of what is broken, to figure out together what is really essential, and to let go of what is not. It is hard to express what happens when these qualities are present within a community. It’s as if we eventually had found, to use Father’s words, “something like the Source, the Origin, God.”

After the workshop, we published in a simple website the questions, the answer and the blessings, to share them with our community, which you can check here:

<https://sites.google.com/view/loesencial/>

Thank you to all of you who were present and to those who made possible these essential explorations.