Introduction:

The process of reflection on the theme *Culture Changes and Spiritual Challenges* based on the Txintxa papers prepared by Sara Jona Laisse from Mozambique and Marian Ronan from USA, was very fruitful for all of us. We reflected that it is necessary to have more moments like this to continue nourishing our mystic and search in the Grail. The “newness” of this search is in this exercise to deep in our questions, such as the cultural and spiritual diversity, as well as gender and social justice questions.

Both articles gave us the opportunity to talk about our experiences with groups who are considered minorities; to talk about the tension and inner conflicts that many times obstruct human relationship, which shows that we reproduce among us the hierarchical social relations present in society. It is healthy to bring those reflections to the debate since they can make us to move forward a life in abundance. Diversity does not threaten commitment with the group, with its continuity and permanence in history, on the contrary, it strengthens the understanding that Grail richness is in the different expressions of human life.

Reflecting on the colorful cards some of us saw that one card brings an organized plurality that may empower the actions present there. And the other card also reveals plurality, but a plurality which isn’t organized and that may weaken the different manifestations. Others reflected on our habit in looking for duality in everything, the differences between the cards does not mean that one expresses plurality and the other diversity, but both can show these aspects.

Below are the answers to the questions:

1) WHICH ARE THE STRONGEST CULTURE INFLUENCES IN YOUR COUNTRY NOWADAYS? AND WHICH CULTURE INFLUENCES ARE GETTING WEAK?

The influences more strong today are: the consumerism; media and new communication technologies, growth of individualism as influence of the capitalism system and of the non-
critical use of social nets in internet; spread of a materialistic and hedonist vision, cult of superfluous and of sexual pleasure with damages to more deep and solid human relationships; Neo Pentecostal churches; new family arrangements (children raised by single parents or grandmothers, gays or lesbian couples with children, couples with children from different unions); stress; loneliness; food quality influenced by transgenic food and hormones.

**Influences which are getting weak:** Life quality, subsistence agriculture, popular “mutirão” (joint effort), popular culture such as traditional religious feasts, citizen culture and values such as respect and human person dignity; arts and crafts from pre-industrial era as profession;

2) **IN WHICH WAY THE SPIRITUALITY OF YOUR GRAIL GROUP WAS AFFECTED/CHALLENGED BY THESE CULTURAL INFLUENCES?**

- We don’t “have time” to gather and nourish our Mystic;
- Diversity is exhausting us (not by diversity in itself, but for the excess of information and (de) formation);
- We don’t have, as much as we would like, the habit of spending time together and communicate by ordinary mail. We are used to electronic communication, but the relation isn’t the same.

3) **IN WHICH WAY YOUR GROUP SPIRITUALITY HAS CHANGED LATELY AND WHAT YOU THINK ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE?**

- There is a lack on the continuity of our meetings to strengthen us as Grail group. In other times we used to come together with more intensity. - Interaction with diversity and plurality sometimes makes us to lose “focus”
  - We need to face our tendency to a fundamentalist attitude
- To hope in the possibility of creating alternatives that may change the scenery.
- What we have in common as a Grail group is the work to empower women, to strengthen by collective actions. To be able to do this we need to be strong, we need transcendence. We discussed that if we find what link us in the National Grail, it will be easier to find it in the
International Grail. (We refer here to the discussions brought by Marian Rohan on the Grail spirituality).

4) DO YOU HAVE OTHER COMMENTS OR OBSERVATIONS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?

After the debate we agreed that there 3 areas that call our attention in the Grail: WOMEN, SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. Having in mind this tripod we asked ourselves, which is the newness that unites us? How are women placed in Popular Solidarity Economy – are they just reproducing the traditional roles? Which difference does the Grail bring to its projects?

In the reflections on spirituality, we identified also the different ways we live our faith and the way we learn, or not, to experience our relation with God. The Grail is a place that nourishes our mystic, and for some of us it means a complementary way of living faith; for others, however, it becomes the only place to live and nourish faith. We discussed that we search in the Grail cup nourishment for our mystic; hope to strengthen our journey. But it is necessary also to fill the cup to strengthen it. It is necessary to think: what may I bring to the cup to make it overflow life and abundance?

In our assembly the Work Team in Formation made a proposal for all the members. During the year of 2011 we will study on feminist spirituality and on women struggles through history. We will make also a reflection on our Mystic and Spirituality with exercises to be done individually, in local groups and then in national group.
At our Annual Meeting on May 14-15, 2010, the Canadian Grail discussed the following two questions

1. What are the strongest cultural influences present in your country today?

2. In what ways is the spirituality of your Grail grouping being affected/challenged by cultural influences?

We considered this to be a preliminary discussion only as we did not have time to go deeper into the reports of the discussion groups. We will take more time to probe these questions in the future.

1. What are the strongest cultural influences present in your country today?

Canada is a country of regions with distinct cultures. It is also one of the most multi-cultural countries in the world and in spite of some problems it is having success with multi-culturalism. The society is enriched in many ways through this diversity of cultures and religions.

The class structures in the country remain almost untouched by this phenomenon. We also feel the effects of corporate rule by a disappointing right wing leaning government which tends to be top down rather than participatory and does not represent the views of the population. Some provincial governments and the federal government favour downsizing of governments as a way to deal with the current economic crisis which this country survived better than most, thus far. Radicalized poverty is still a big problem as is aboriginal and rural poverty. The prevailing globalize neo-liberal agenda followed by our government exacerbates poverty in the areas mentioned. It also weakens the social safety net and undermines human rights. At the same time there are many energetic and forceful groups working hard and effectively for social transformation on several levels of society.

Success is measured in this country by having a lot of money. This leads to societal stratification according to income. The society is consumer orientated and workers seeking a better life often endure long exasperating commutes to work. This can lead them to seek communal identity in their workplaces rather than in their communities.
Church
There is a decline in church attendance throughout the country and especially among the youth. Although the corporate owned media has taken aim at the Catholic Church, other mainline denominations are also in trouble with declining attendance and other problems. While fundamentalists constitute only 10 percent of the population, they are creating a fundamentalist wave in the current government.

Technology
Technology affects the culture of the country, especially the youth who spend much of their time on computers and playing video games or texting. This takes time from other areas of life. On the positive side, technology offers greater possibilities for communicating.

Two other positive aspects of the culture that we noted are strong awareness of gender and the need to be green and reduce our carbon footprint.

Grail members are mindful of the preponderance of people of colour in the larger cities such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. In Toronto the Grail is Caucasian and middle class while 70 percent of the population will be people of colour by 2030.

2. In what ways is the spirituality of your Grail grouping being affected/challenged by the cultural influences?

Some members find rituals at Grail meetings to be more meaningful than ecclesial celebrations. We also enrich our awareness of God’s presence in the natural world, the cosmos and in a growing awareness of native culture and spirituality. Members feel the need for transformation in the church through more meaningful liturgies and homilies and challenge to clerical/hierarchical control. Many find the practice of centering prayer and contemplative prayer to be very helpful in feeding their spirit and providing spiritual growth. Reading is also important as is praxis – action/reflection for social justice.
A) Cultural changes and spiritual challenges. Mexican grail group of Morelos/Valley of Mexico.

Note: in this drawing the group identified the cultural factors which are impacting Mexico and some of the consequences which we are suffering as a result of these factors.
B) The following activity of the Mexican grail group of Morelos/valley of Mexico was the identification of the spiritual challenges which result from the impact of the principal cultural factors in the Mexican culture.

**Spiritual challenges for the Grail**

1. Loss of prestige of ecclesiastical and political hierarchical authorities.
2. Discredit of cultural roots.
3. Resistance to the mass means of communication. And the multinational corporations.
4. Increasing consciousness of the environmental crisis.
5. Need for feminine leadership.
6. Need to reduce family and community violence.

C) Having identified the chief spiritual challenges, the Group proceeded to indicate the main areas of concentration of the work of the grail in response to the challenges,(work already begun in some communities).

**Priority areas of work in response to the spiritual challenges**

1. Formation for the building of a mature and conscious citizenship at the community and parish level.
2. Rescue of our cultural roots and of the indigenous cosmosvision.
3. Promotion of a simplicity of life style which leads to Responsible patterns of consumption.
5. Promotion of workshops for specific leaderships: Environment, integral nutrition, conflict resolution, gerencia.
Nota: en este dibujo el grupo identificó los factores culturales que están impactando en la cultura mexicana y algunas de las consecuencias que sufrimos como resultado de estos factores.
B) A continuación el grupo del grial México Morelos/Valle de México identificó los desafíos espirituales que resultan del impacto de los factores culturales señaladas.

Desafíos espirituales para el Grial

1. Desprestigio de las jerarquías eclesiales y políticas
2. Desprecio de las raíces culturales
3. Resistencia a los medios de comunicación y compañías Trasnacionales
4. Reconocimiento de la crisis ambiental
5. Necesidad de liderazgos femeninos
6. Necesidad de reducir los espacios de violencia Familiar y comunitaria

C) Enseguida el grupo identifico los ejes de trabajo que hay que fortalecer para mitigar los desafíos ya señalados.

Ejes de trabajo para mitigar los desafíos

1. Formación para construir ciudadanía madura y consciente a nivel comunitario y parroquial
2. Rescate de riqueza cultural y su cosmovisión indígena
3. Promover estilos de vida sencillo que nos lleve a un Consumo responsable
4. Apoyar proyectos comunitarios que ayuden a conservar, Preservar el entorno: crear suelos, cuidar el agua, Siembra orgánica.
5. Impulsar talleres de liderazgo específico: medio ambiente, alimentación integral, violencia familiar, gestión, elaboración de proyectos de equidad de género, crecimiento personal y crupal, prevención del abuso infantil.