



a MATTER of SPIRIT

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Listening at the heart of Dialogue

The heart of dialogue is a simple but profound capacity to listen.

By William Isaacs

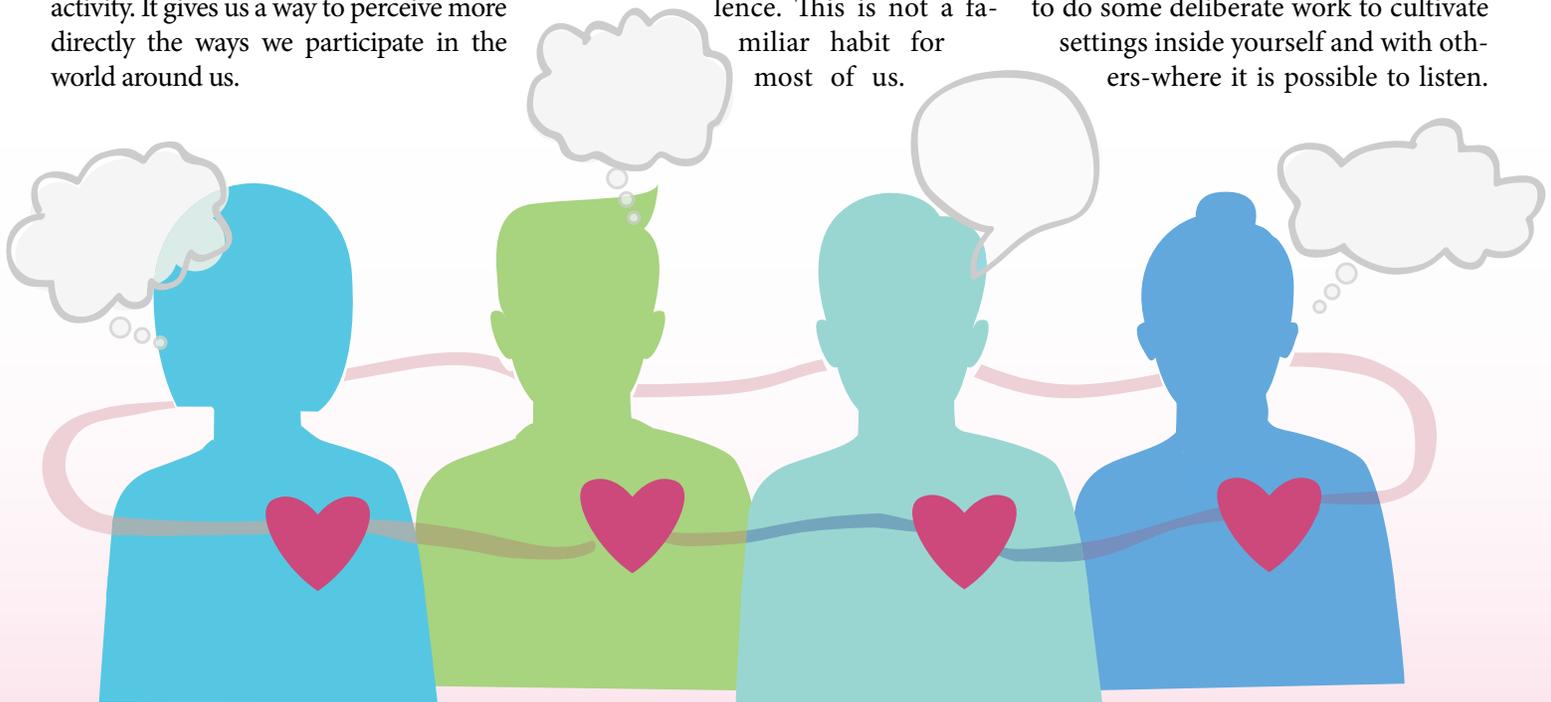
Listening requires we not only hear the words, but also embrace, accept, and gradually let go of our own inner clamoring. As we explore it, we discover that listening is an expansive activity. It gives us a way to perceive more directly the ways we participate in the world around us.

This means listening not only to others but also to ourselves and our own reactions. Recently a manager in a program I was leading told me, "You know, I have always prepared myself to speak. But I have never prepared myself to listen." This is, I have found, a common condition. For listening, a subject we often take for granted, is actually very hard to do, and we are rarely prepared for it.

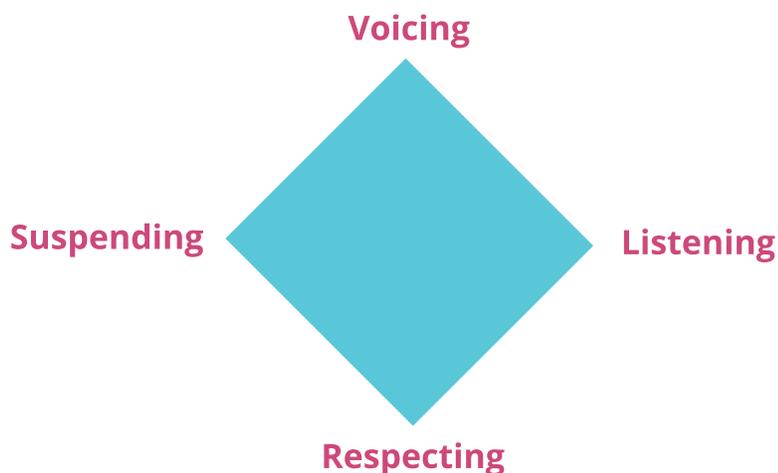
To listen is to develop an inner silence. This is not a familiar habit for most of us.

Emerson once joked that ninety-five percent of what goes on in our minds is none of our business! We often pay great attention to what goes on in us, when what is actually required is a kind of disciplined self-forgetting. This does not have to be difficult. It is within the reach of each of us.

To do this you do not have to retreat to a monastery or to be converted to some new belief. You do, though, have to do some deliberate work to cultivate settings inside yourself and with others-where it is possible to listen.



NEW CAPACITIES FOR BEHAVIOR



<p>Voicing</p> <p>Speaking the truth of one's own authority, what one really is and thinks.</p> <p>Asks: What needs to be said?</p>	<p>Listening</p> <p>Without resistance or imposition.</p> <p>Asks: How does this feel?</p>
<p>Respecting</p> <p>Awareness of the integrity of another's position and the impossibility of fully understanding it.</p> <p>Asks: How does this fit?</p>	<p>Suspending</p> <p>Suspension of assumptions, judgement, and certainty.</p> <p>Asks: How does this work?</p>

—William Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, Currency, page 419

In other words, you must create a space in which listening can occur.

The ways we have learned to listen, to impose or apply meaning to the world, are very much a function of our mental models, of what we hold in our minds as truths. But the physical functioning of our ears, and how they differ from other senses, can shed light on how we can learn to “make sense” in new ways.

THE SENSE OF HEARING

The sense of hearing is ever present. Our hearing puts us on the map. It balances us. Our sense of balance is intimately tied to our hearing; both come from the same source within our bodies.

We listen in a way that tells us about the dimensionality of our world. Hearing is auditory, of course, relating to sound. The word auditory and oral have the same roots as the word audience and auditorium. Their most ancient root means “to place perception.” When we listen, we place our perceptions.

Our culture, though, is dominated by sight. We see thousands of images flashed across our minds in an hour of television or the Internet. The result of this external bombardment of visual impressions is that we tend now to think in these ways. In the Western world we have begun to be habituated to this quick pace, and are impatient

with other rhythms. But seeing and listening are very different.

The substance of seeing is light. Light moves at a far more rapid pace than sound: 186,000 miles per second as opposed to 1,100 feet per second. To listen, in other words, you must slow down and operate at the speed of sound rather than at the speed of light.

The eye seems to perceive at a superficial level, at the level of reflected light.¹ While the eye sees at the surface, the ear tends to penetrate below the surface.

To listen well, we must attend both to the words and the silence between the words.

LISTENING AND THE PRINCIPLE OF PARTICIPATION

Our capacity to listen puts us in contact with the wider dimensions of the world in which we live. It lets us connect to it. Listening can open in us a door, a greater sense of participation in the world. I see listening, properly understood and developed, as an immediate gateway that can connect us with the much-touted but much-misunderstood notion that we live in a “participative universe,” one of the four key principles that underlie the approach to dialogue proposed in [*Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*]. The principle of participation builds upon the realization that individuals are active participants in the living world, a part of nature as well as observers of it. At the heart of the matter here is the idea that human beings participate intimately in their worlds and are not separate from them.

The principle of participation that lies behind the practice of listening is well demonstrated by a hologram. A hologram is a three-dimensional image created by the interference pattern of two interacting laser beams. All the information contained on the plate is enfolded into every part of the plate.

Language Is Holographic

Our language is also holographic. Each word contains not only the wider context of paragraph and sentence but

the deeper context of our lives. When you first interact with someone, their initial words carry the entire hologram of their consciousness to you.

Every part of ourselves is enfolded in every part of our conversations whether we realize it or not. But we cannot always tell the extent of our participation. There is not enough information to produce a clear and coherent understanding. We lack a focusing process—a way of containing the enormity in a small space. Dialogue is the focusing mechanism for the hologram of conversation. Through it we can expand our awareness to include ever-greater wholeness. Dialogue is a process that can allow us to become aware of our participation in a much wider whole. Like the telescope, it focuses the available light more completely so that we can see more.



LEARNING TO LISTEN

Learning to listen begins with recognizing how you are listening now. Generally, we are not all that conscious of how we listen. You can begin to listen by listening first to yourself and to your own reactions. Ask yourself, What do I feel here? or How does this feel? Try to identify what you feel more carefully and directly. Beginning with the perception of your own feelings connects you to your heart and to the heart of your experience. To learn to be present, we must learn to notice what we are feeling now.

Be Aware of Thought

As you begin to listen, you can also begin to notice what you are thinking. Focus your thoughts on someone you care about for a moment. Almost immediately, you may find that you are flooded with thoughts and images of that person. You may also experience a range of feelings. Your memory plays a very powerful force in how you per-

ceive those around you.

To listen is to realize that much of our reaction to others comes from memory; it is stored reaction, not fresh response at all. Listening from my predispositions in this way is listening from the “net” of thought that I cast on a particular situation.²

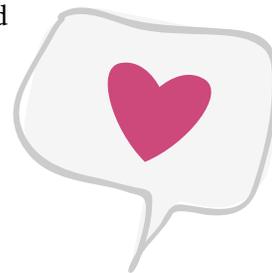
Stick to the Facts

We need to learn to listen with a great deal more humility. This typically means literally coming down to earth and connecting what we think with the experiences that lead us to think it. While this may seem obvious and easy, in practice people continually jump to conclusions, speak abstractly, and fail to notice they are doing so. A new discipline of listening to what is said can make a real change. This is not always so

Listening can open in us a door, a greater sense of participation in the world.

easy to do. We are often unaware of the extent to which we assume what we see is what is there. A colleague of mine tells the story of a man who went one day to pick up his high-school-age daughter and another girl. As he drove up to the place he was to meet her, he saw her leaning on a black BMW sedan. Standing nearby were two young men, both with pagers and cell phones. One had a ponytail. This man’s immediate thought: drug dealers! But he noticed how he had begun to judge them, and stopped himself. He went up and started to talk to them, and found that they were volunteer firemen, that the

BMW was used and much older than he had realized, and that the young men were very gentle, very bright, and capable.



The Ladder of Inference

We need to distinguish between the inferences we make about experience and the experience itself. Why is this important? One of the ways we sustain the culture of thinking alone is that we form conclusions and then do not test them, treating our initial inferences as facts. We wall ourselves off, in other words, from the roots of our own thinking. And when we are invested in an opinion, we tend to seek evidence that we are right and avoid evidence that we are wrong. Errors of this sort can have devastating consequences.

Follow the Disturbance

Slowing down our thinking and listening in this way is not so easy, in part because the landscape is not neutral. Some of the memories we have are painful. They move very swiftly and grab us by the scruff of the neck. By the time we realize their influence, we are caught. Often when we listen to others we may discover that we are listening from disturbance; in other words, we are listening from an emotional memory rather than from the present moment.

Listen Without Resistance

[This] relates directly to the challenge of listening beyond the net of our thought, and even the disturbances we may feel. This may be better put as “listen while noticing resistance.” The challenge here is to become conscious of the ways in which we project our opinions about others onto them, how we color or distort what is said without realizing it.

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¹This was one of the reasons Plato mistrusted the “mimetic,” or image based, artists; his fear was that they would distort people’s sense of reality

²David Bohm and Mark Edwards, *Changing Consciousness* (San Francisco: Harper Books, 1991).

Do Your Best and Leave the Rest to God

By *Gretchen Gundrum*

The Dominicans have a saying that goes something like this: “The first person who needs to be converted is the preacher.” To give a good reflection on the Gospel, the speaker must live the Word herself—letting it permeate her heart and soul. Otherwise, her witness will be hollow, inauthentic. When asked to write about how ordinary people can be contemplative, my reaction was “I’m not the best person to be talking about contemplation.” But my objections were overridden, so here we are. I am being converted.

What Does It Mean to be “Contemplative?”

Contemplation, meditation, mindfulness, centering prayer, and gratitude practice all have one thing in common: a desire to connect to the Divine. Few of us have time or patience to sit for an hour of daily meditation as religious do in monasteries and convents. But we can engage in *The Practice of the Presence of God* that Brother Lawrence exemplified 300 years ago and that St. Thérèse of Lisieux worked on through her Little Way. In her autobiography she admits anger when being intermittently splashed with dishwater by another novice but converts it into silent prayer. I’m sure I’d have wanted to give that other sister at least a dirty look. Not having arrived at sainthood, some of us are clearly works-in-progress.

Richard Rohr teaches that “You cannot not live in the presence of God,” because God surrounds us everywhere within, and without. Our task is to become conscious of that, done best by being present to the situation in which

we find ourselves. Our spiritual DNA pulses with longing to be reconnected to the Source of our existence. We live in Mystery and we know we will die into it. Meanwhile, we are gifted daily by opportunities to love, be creative and grateful for all that is—even some challenges we’d rather not be dealing with. We know that “for those that love God, all things work together for good.” (Rom. 8:28) Being in the present moment and enjoying it is both the easiest and the most difficult contemplative practice there is. Our minds ruminate on the past and fantasize about the future. We lose the present—all that we really have.

What does living in the awareness of God’s presence do to and for us? It functions like a circuit breaker, to get us out of the trance of our egoic patterns that keep us stuck in self-centered space. When admiring the beauty of a flower, the tiny hand of a baby with its grasping fingers and miniscule fingernails, the sun peeking out after a gray,

rainy day, I find there’s no space in my psyche for anger, fear, irritation, or impatience. I must slow down to see and absorb the reality in front of me. God’s reality. It’s a reminder that I’m not in charge of the Universe. I am a part of Something immense, something I can only hope I might one day understand. This fills me with awe.

Learning to sit quietly and invite God into conversation is a wonderful practice. Pouring out our hearts—the troubles, fears, worries, joys, sorrows, pain, and hopes that are part of human life—keeps us grounded and connected to our Source. I’ve never considered myself a great meditator—my monkey mind, as the Buddhists call it—is always overactive, and I worry that I’m not “doing it right.” To let go of feeling that one has to achieve something is important. Willingness to take the time to connect to God, to keep coming back to focus on the breath and the word or mantra that keeps me out of my head is key. Spend-



ing 10 or 20 minutes several times a week sitting in silence allows God to do sweet and gentle work on the soul and spirit. I receive greater clarity about my life, and more space to be compassionate to myself and others. I just have to get out of my own way and let God be God.

There are many ways of entering into

moments of enriched stillness. Classic lectio divina involves the use of Scripture to prime one's consciousness. Visio divina uses pictures, paintings, or photographs as centering tools. Pictures may be of Jesus, Mary, or the saints, or they might be beautiful photographs of nature. Extraverts may prefer a walking

WVI, C.G. Jung drew a mandala every morning as a way of grounding himself in preparation to face the suffering of the day. And let's not leave out our pets—walking with them, stroking them, and communing with them can also be a way of connecting to the Source. Not to mention lowering one's blood pressure.

The work of sanctification is God's; our role is to be open and ready. Thomas Merton once said: "It is the will to pray that is the essence of prayer. And the desire to find God, and to seek God, and to love God is the one thing that matters." We don't have to be perfect contemplatives because we can't. We only have to do our best, and leave the rest to God.

Spending 10 or 20 minutes several times a week sitting in silence allows God to do sweet and gentle work on the soul and spirit.

contemplative practice. Introverts and extraverts will have different preferences. Introverts may find a "sitting" practice the most helpful. Listening to music, lighting a candle, doing lectio or visio divina, and reflecting in a quiet space in one's home can provide

meditation in nature or walking a labyrinth. Journaling, gardening, playing a musical instrument, drawing, singing, painting or dancing are also means of entering into sacred space. Adult coloring books are being espoused as a way of centering. When he was a medic in

▲ **Gretchen Gundrum, Ph.D.** teaches psychospiritual development at the School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University. She is also a psychologist in private practice, integrating spirituality into her work with clients.

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Stand Still

Perhaps the simplest and most potent practice for listening is simply to be still. By being still in ourselves, quieting the inner chatter of our minds, we can open up to a way of being present and listening that cuts through everything. Think of this as calming the surface of the waters of our experience so that we can see below to the depths.

To stand still is to come into contact with the wholeness that pervades everything, that is already here. It is to touch the aliveness of the universe. To be lost is to lose contact with this wholeness.

Listening from silence means listening for and receiving the meanings that well up from deep within us. These creative pulses may move in us, but often we are too busy to pay attention. Stand still.

THE ART OF LISTENING TOGETHER

Listening is usually considered singular activity. But in dialogue one dis-

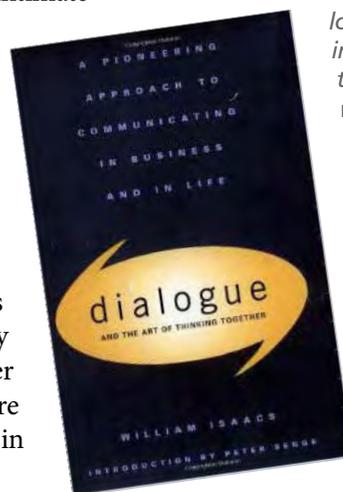
covers a further dimension of listening: the ability not only to listen, but to listen together as a part of a larger whole.

When people listen together, dialogue can sometimes evoke a deep and unusual experience of common understanding and communion. This is what is meant by a term coined by the early Christian communities at the beginning of the first millennium: koinonia. It means "impersonal fellowship." In this state, people connect very intimately with one another, but not intrusively.

Listen for the Dilemmas

One of the reasons people struggle to say what they think is that they are in a dilemma. In situations like these, people typically fail to hear what the other actually intends. Often there is a fair degree of "noise" in the communication.

What are we to do? The challenge is to become aware of the fact that especially when we try hard to listen, we will often still have a part of us actively failing to do so. The key is to simply become aware of this, to make conscious just what we are doing. Awareness is curative; as we stand still, our listening can open us into frontiers we did not realize were there.



▲ Excerpt taken from *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, Chapter 4: *Listening* by William Isaacs, reprinted with permission from the author. Isaacs is Founder and President of Dialogos, a leadership consulting and strategy development firm based in Cambridge, MA. He co-founded the Organizational Learning Center at MIT and is a Senior Lecturer at MIT's Sloan School of Management.

Listening to become a Church of Mercy

“We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy... Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life.” —POPE FRANCIS, *Misericordiae Vultus*

By John Whitney, SJ

Sitting beside Maggie's bed, I could see what the last few days had done to her, how it had worn her down and taken from her the small reserves of strength she had managed to retain. Now, she was barely able to sit up, and the rasp of fluid could be heard in her throat as she breathed—with the aid of oxygen—through the small opening in her neck. In her eyes there was just an ember of the life that had been there only a few days before, and, though she could not speak, I knew the thought that sat behind the small smile she turned to me: “Well, that was close,” it said. “But there won't be many more.” Holding her hand, I looked back at her without tears, and with the same resigned smile said simply, “I know. I know. I know.” Past fear or hope, past forgiveness or regret, past consolation or despair, we sat together in that moment as one heart: attuned to each other, listening to each other, held in communion through the mercy of God.

Such a moment of grace, so common and yet so extraordinary, offers an insight into the true meaning

of God's mercy, and into the great hope offered to the Church in this Jubilee Year of Mercy. For mercy is more than forgiveness, more than a simple remission of sins or the letting go of past injuries. Rather, mercy is presence and embrace; it is “opening one's heart to wretchedness¹ and holding the other in communion, even at the risk of pain. Mercy is, indeed, the way God forgives us, but it also transcends mere forgiveness. For unlike justice, which applies law, or forgiveness, which mitigates its transgression, mercy involves communion between persons and the reconciliation of broken hearts. It is God reaching out to us with love

and becoming one with us in our struggles; God drawing us into the divine life through an engagement that reaches its fullness in the Incarnation. Mercy is the Spirit, spoken over the waters that brings forth life; it is the Father, hearing the cries of the Hebrew children and calling Moses to set them free; it is Jesus, speaking with the Samaritan woman and liberating her from loneliness, allowing her to proclaim with joy, “He told me everything I have done.” (John 4:39) Mercy is God, listening to the world with compassion, and speaking a covenant of love into the heart of every woman and man willing to listen.

Yet, if the mercy of God is about personal encounter—and not simply about abstract structures of justice or ritual remission of sins—then the Jubilee Year of Mercy must be about encounter, as well, and not simply about social remedies or personal penances. It must be about speaking and listening, about discerning God in the other and about listening



to God in oneself. It must be concerned with the reality of the Spirit incarnated not just in Catholics, but in all people of the world—in the poor Syrian grandmother who cannot feed the children left into her care; in the undocumented Salvadoran, detained and facing deportation back to his gang-held village; in the Brazilian wife, whose Zika virus puts the child she carries at risk; and in the young African American teenager, filled with rage at the death of so many peers. The Jubilee of Mercy summons us to listen to the voices of individual women and men, and treat them not as categories to be sorted nor as problems to be solved, but as beloved brothers and sisters, unique expressions of God, worthy of our time and attention. As Pope Francis might say, a Year of Mercy must be a year about reality and not simply about ideas.

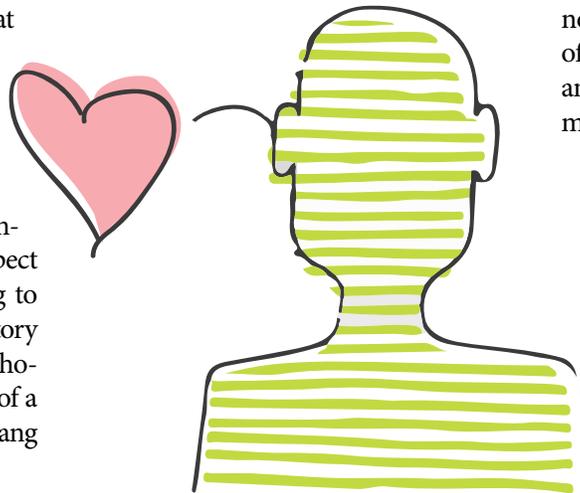
And no one demonstrates what this Jubilee Year of Mercy can be more than Francis himself. Whether standing in the mud of the Central African Republic, where he opened the Jubilee Doors a week before they were opened in Rome, or sitting in a mosque with leaders of the Muslim community, where he spoke of mutual respect and understanding; whether traveling to Cuba, to meet for the first time in history with the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, or kneeling in the midst of a Mexican hospital, as poor children sang

Mercy is God, listening to the world with compassion, and speaking a covenant of love into the heart of every woman and man willing to listen.

“Ave Maria” for him; whether reminding the bishops of the Synod on the Family, “The Church’s first duty is not to hand down condemnations or anathemas, but to proclaim God’s mercy,”² or asking forgiveness of other Christian communities for sins committed by the Catholic Church against them, Francis has borne witness to mercy that embraces and listens, that challenges even as it brings closer. Shying away from doctrinal abstractions, he has waded into the world, in all its brokenness, offering himself as a catalyst for mercy—a listener for those who need to speak, a

speaker for those who have been silenced, a presence to those for whom words have grown empty, being so often broken.

If we, as Church, are to take seriously this Jubilee Year of Mercy, we must become, at every level, what Francis invites us by example to be. We must wade into the world, in all its complexity and woundedness. We must listen actively and humbly especially to voices so often excluded from our dialogues: to women and racial minorities, refugees and migrants, indigenous peoples and the LGBT community. We must practice the works of mercy not as patrons but as partners, not simply as duties of justice but as part of our communion with every woman and man. This is the mercy of God, the mercy planted in each human heart.



¹Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, Kindle Edition, Loc. 194.

²Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis at the Conclusion of the Synod of Bishops. Bishops.

▲ Fr. John D. Whitney, SJ is pastor of St. Joseph Church, Seattle, and a former Provincial of the Oregon Province of the Society of Jesus.



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Interfaith Dialogue

By Mary Kay Kantz and Mohammad Samarah

Gathered around benches near the river, we were enjoying Esa's pasta and homemade garlic bread, chatting and laughing together. We were young and old, black and white, healthy and not, some owning comfortable beds, some living in the woods, Muslim, Christian and Jew. Project Downtown, a ministry that calls for taking time to engage in conversation with hungry folks on the street while sharing a meal, was the brainchild of Muslim students at Florida universities.

Our own Project Downtown group had its roots in the counter-cultural journey begun a year earlier by eighteen Muslims and Christians in Melbourne, Florida. News reports of a shooting at a local mosque and anti-Muslim speakers on the luncheon circuit led members of the JustFaith community at a Catholic parish to ask an imam if he would connect us with some Muslims who might be interested in interfaith dialogue.

The idea of Muslims and Christians sitting down together can raise antagonism and apprehension even within faith communities. As the JustFaith group began promoting the idea of interfaith dialogue, some parishioners echoed the too-common, media-inspired fear and anger toward Islam. We learned that a public invitation can, unfortunately, draw people who are more interested in confrontation than in sharing and learning.

There was also some hesitation and fear within the Muslim community. When members of your faith are being physically or verbally attacked out of ignorance and hatred, you might well have some concern

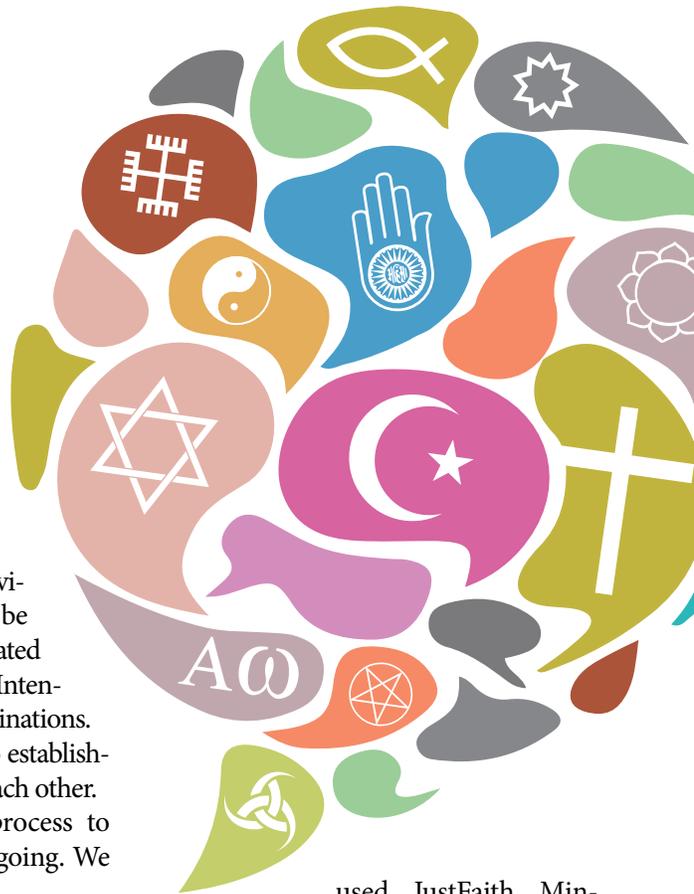
about agreeing to engage with a roomful of strangers. So we found it best to start out small. By extending personal invitations to some we knew would be open to the experience, we created a space for respectful listening. Intentions are the vehicle to new destinations. Unity of intention is essential to establishing trust in the process and in each other.

Having some format or process to start with can help get things going. We

Transformation came about because we resolved that every participant had to be committed to heartfelt listening.



Essa Samarah helps a man who is homeless obtain a drivers license as part of the Project Downtown group.



used JustFaith Ministries' eight-week program, "The Sultan and the Saint," written for just such a group. Any process, of course, calls for honest communication and a willingness to be flexible and responsive to each group's needs. Then the dialogue becomes your own.

At our first gathering, conversation was stilted and folks shifted a bit uncomfortably in their chairs until we took a break for refreshments. Within minutes we found ourselves in lively little groups, each one including both Catholics and Muslims. We instinctively recognized that we were there to become friends, not simply to study each other. Whether over shortbread and lemonade or goat stew and hot tea, our mid-session breaks became a key to our success, spilling over into light, cheerful discussions and leading us to plan picnics and parties at other times, too.

As in any relationship, members of the group have to be able to talk freely and listen uncritically with open ears and hearts. Being ready to discover friendship, being flexible enough to let conversations move along naturally, led

us to a point of sharing personal stories and asking whatever questions any of us had about the other's faith. The experience was life-changing.

Transformation came about because we resolved that every participant had to be committed to heartfelt listening. There was to be no preaching, no proselytizing, no denigrating the other faith. Rather, all were invited to listen with fully open minds for similarities between the faiths as well as significant differences, for places where all find God in their lives, for the way to a spirit of companionship on the faith journey.

We were all surprised by the similarities we found between Islam and Christianity, and we were enlightened and inspired by our visits to each other's places of worship, Friday for Jumu'ah prayer, Sunday for Mass. One



Mohammad Samarah and Mary Kay Kantz

of the major similarities between Islam and Christianity is the command to love God and to love and serve our brothers and sisters in this world. We are called to imitate the prophets, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and Mohammad (peace be upon both of them). As we learned about each other's faiths, we looked ahead to engaging in a justice project, especially one that would help us continue to be in contact with each other when our initial commitment to the dialogue group ended. Accordingly, our Project Downtown group was born.

The Quran says, "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other.) Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you." (49:13) Our story is worth sharing because it highlights everything good about the human race. Strangers came together for the first time, had a conversation, and then realized *we are one tribe*. In the second meeting we became friends. A few months into it, we became champions for one another. Our story illustrates the power of listening, rooted in curiosity, to know others.

wanted to walk in someone else's shoes and enter into another's faith experience, to gain patience and understanding.

I engaged him about the book, faith, science, and biblical interpretation. It was a great conversation, but when he invited me to go to his church with him a small sense of fear and anxiety overcame me. Do I go? Do I ask the question? With a deep breath I asked if I joined him would I be accepted by his church as a gay woman? He seemed to struggle but spoke with compassion and then challenged me biblically. I challenged him from my theological perspective and my experience of love and grace.

We genuinely listened, empathized,

Practical Tips for Engaging in Interfaith Dialogue

Start out small, cultivating a group first by personal invitation.

Having a process helps, but keep it flexible to encourage genuine communication.

Be sure to include mid-session breaks for simple refreshments and conversation.

Never underestimate the power of prayer; look for comfortable ways to pray together.

Always be committed to engaging in heartfelt listening.

- ▲ **Mary Kay Kantz** is a former member of the faculty of the Case Western Reserve University School of Law. She is retired and lives with her husband in Greenville, South Carolina. **Mohammad Samarah** is a computer scientist and a graduate of Florida Institute of Technology. He lives in Melbourne Beach with his wife, Tammy and two daughters and two sons. He is blessed with a baby daughter named Bindie.

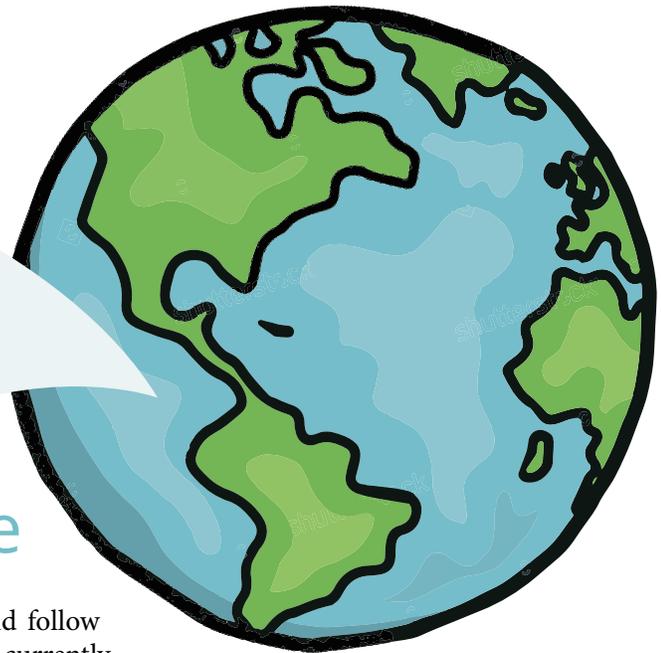
Table Fellowship

During football playoffs I was at a local brewery to watch the game with some friends. I noticed a middle-aged, white gentleman reading a book on science and religion. My interest was peaked. I overheard a conversation he was having with the person next to him on creation so I assumed he was an evangelical. As a Catholic and a lesbian, my prejudgments and fears were at the surface, yet I felt compelled to enter into dialogue with this man. I am not sure how I overcame my fear other than I had been craving to get outside of my box and encounter someone with a vastly different view. I

and grappled with what each other was presenting. I cannot speak for him but I know I walked away with a sense that as much as I wanted to be embraced as a human worthy of table fellowship, I needed to view him in that way too. He did not change my faith as I am sure that I did not change his faith and how he interprets the Bible, but we truly encountered each other and saw each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

- ▲ **Theresa Lukasik** currently works at the Ignatian Spirituality Center as their Ignite Coordinator: Ignatian Spirituality for Young Adults. She received her MA in Spirituality from Loyola University of Chicago.

Listening to Earth



A Contemplative Response

By Sharon Zayac, OP

Listen to Earth! What does that mean? Why would we even take the time to listen? How do we listen, particularly when more and more of us are living in the world of *virtual* reality? How do we hear Earth's cry when she doesn't text us?

Once upon a time an article with this title would have evoked from me a description of the many facets of Earth that have filled me with profound awe, deep gratitude, an intense desire to be more and do more and take in more. That all remains true. But it is more than that. We know now that listening to Earth is much more than that. Indeed, simply by virtue of what we are, our listening is more an act of being rather than doing.

It was Winter of 1999. The four of us, well bundled against the cold, walked the pasture areas of the farm just bursting with the knowledge that this land would become ours to explore, to nurture, and to share

with all the guests that would follow us from the retreat center we currently operated on the other side of the city. We came filled with the excitement of our vision to build a small retreat center and make what was to become Jubilee Farm the "go-to place" for retreat, re-creation, and all things sustainable. In less than fifteen minutes, we knew that was not what the land asked from us. The message was subtle and very clear. No words. No thoughts. Not even a definable feeling. Just a deep, abiding knowing that we were not to violate the integrity of the land with septic systems, bulldozers, and paved drives. Our presence here must be in concert with all the land offered us and those who would come after us.

Quickly letting go of the buildings we had envisioned, we still moved forward full-steam with constructing our first Ten-Year Plan. We carefully laid out what we would do each of the next ten years to create a model ecology center. We soon learned that things do not happen in the linear progression of human planning but in cyclic, rhythmic, organic patterns. Most of the activities we stretched out over ten years were in motion within the first three! And Earth has continued to teach us that what needs to happen here will happen in its own time.

All of us have experienced some incredible beauty that forever marks our souls: sunbeams, passing clouds, mountains, a waft of fresh air, moonlight in a puddle of water, a single blade of grass growing out of a crack in a battered sidewalk, another's kindness. Earth constantly begs our attention. She is ever present to us, assuring us we belong, that we are part of the greater community of life. She is not separate from us. She is one with us. In fact, we are Earth in her human expression, formed from her, holding all her elements in our uniquely human mode. It is our relationship with her that makes us human, just as the relationship of whale to Earth makes whale.

By virtue of what we are, we cannot but help hear Earth speak. One with her, our voice is Earth's voice, one of her many voices. When we listen to any part of her, we hear our greater self. When we speak, we are Earth expressing that part of herself. And she counts on our voice more than ever before.

Earth's collective voice is adamant, persistent, and increasingly urgent. Her cries, our cries, fill our internet and television screens and make tragic covers on our magazines, demanding our attention again and again and again. We, together with the great community of life that is Earth, are embroiled in a

Listening to Earth means we listen to one another.

conflagration of crises that is undoing the web of relationships that has existed for millions of years. We do hear Earth's cries. They are our own. The challenge is how we, individually and corporately, plan to respond. Melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and the loss of countless species and ecosystems are now beyond our response. Curbing excessive waste and obscene pollution, eliminating fossil-fuel emissions, and meeting head on the massive migrations of peoples are not. Our response requires the human family to pull together on a scale never before imagined. And as Pope Francis repeatedly exhorts us, it demands dialogue with all the affected parties.

Listening to Earth means we listen to one another. And not just those with whom we agree, or who support our thinking, or those who stretch our thinking but are still "safe." We must lis-

ten even to those who seem at total odds with everything we believe. We must listen to what is being said underneath all the rhetoric. All of us are part of the one same cosmic whole. On this grander scale, we are the Universe in human form. There is no "*we and they*" except in our unique expressions as Universe. Each and every voice is part of the greater whole.

That brings us back to the earlier questions about listening to Earth. How do we listen to other humans who don't speak as we do or who don't share our ideals? And how do we hear all those whose voices, human and other than human, are discounted or brutally silenced?

Simply, and yet not so simply, we must want to. We must command the discipline that attentive listening requires of us. That is the *doing* of listening. The *being* of listening comes

Earth's collective voice is adamant, persistent, and increasingly urgent.

with knowing that we are one with the greater whole and that the many voices of Earth are really our own.

▲ Sharon Zayac, OP is Director of Jubilee Farm, her congregation's 164 acre center for ecology and spirituality. She has a Masters in Earth Literacy from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College in Indiana and is available for programs and retreats.

Resources

to Learn More about Contemplation, Listening and Dialogue

WEBSITES

Center for Action and Contemplation, www.cac.org

Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue, www.iccdinstitute.org

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, www.ncdd.org

Network for Grateful Living, www.gratefulness.org

The Contemplative Society, www.contemplative.org

The Compassionate Listening Project, www.compassionatelistening.org

BOOKS

Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, 2004

Judy Cannato, *Radical Amazement*, 2006

Perma Chödrön, *No Time to Loose*, 2005 and *Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living*, 2001

Carol Hwoschinsky, *Listening with the Heart: A Guide For Compassionate Listening*, 2001

William Issaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, 1999

Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*, 1986

Diane M. Millis, PhD, *Conversation the Sacred Art: Practicing Presence in an Age of Distraction*, 2013

Richard Rohr, *Silent Compassion: Finding God in Contemplation*, 2014

Edgar H. Schein, *Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling*, 2013

Marsha Sinetar, *Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics*, 1986

Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, 2001

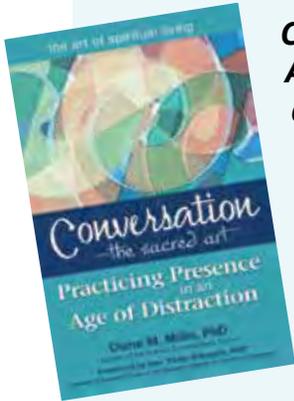
Brother David Steindal-Rast, *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer*, 1984

William Tenny-Brittan, *Prayer for People who Can't Sit Still*, 2005

BOOK REVIEWS

Conversation: The Sacred Art—Practicing Presence in an Age of Distraction

by Diane M. Millis

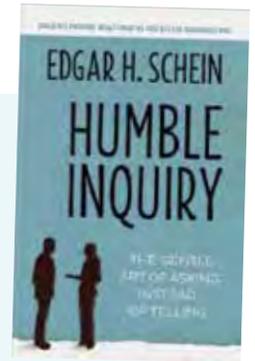


This is a fantastic read for someone who is new to the concept of contemplative dialogue and listening. Diane M. Millis derives from personal narratives and theology her theory that in order to practice the sacred art of conversation, we must learn to speak from “heart to heart.” Millis challenges the reader to view every human interaction, every conversation, as sacred or, as St. Benedict said, to “listen with the ear of the heart.” Through the finding and telling of our own stories in addition to listening to the hearts of others, our conversations become deeper, more meaningful.

Millis recognizes that in today’s distracted world, constantly looking out for “me and mine” makes it difficult to engage in meaningful conversation. She provides thoughtful reflections, breathing exercises, and practices at the end of each chapter that help the reader carry out these principles in a practical way. Rather than simply asking you to digest the text, Mills provides an accessible way to carry out the sacred art of conversation in everyday life through three appendices which include guidelines for small group conversation and personal reflection. I highly recommend this accessible book to someone who is new to contemplative dialogue and meditation.

Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling

by Edgar H. Schein



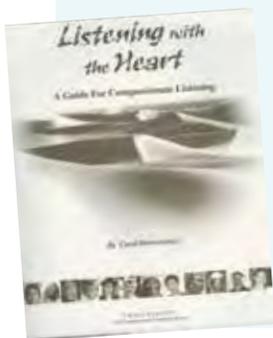
Edgar H. Schein defines Humble Inquiry as, “the fine art of drawing someone out, of asking questions to which you do not already know the answer, of building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person.” In order to become a “humble inquirer,” Schein shows that in spite of living in an individualized and hierarchical culture, we must ask meaningful questions that get to the root of a problem or situation at hand. He challenges us to be humble and open to vulnerability, which is often not favored in a society where having all the answers is rewarded.

Asking instead of telling, Schein argues, is the key to more effective communication within teams and between employers and employees. However, it’s not just about asking questions, it’s about asking the *right* questions that get to the heart of what someone is thinking, feeling, or going through. Schein’s acknowledgement that an individual’s status, culture, and experience can be a barrier to humble inquiry in conversations, but is not impossible to overcome.

Schein provides practical advice for unlearning old habits, and utilizing the benefits of humble inquiry in our personal reflections and relationships as well as our professional lives. I would recommend this book to anyone that wishes to become a more effective communicator, especially in the workplace.

Listening with the Heart: A Guide for Compassionate Listening

by Carol Hwoschinsky



This is a guidebook in three parts. First, it is an opportunity to explore the discipline of listening; illuminating the benefits and potential outcomes of compassionate listening. Secondly, the practice of listening is considered in order to develop individual skills and provide a road map for communal listening. Part three highlights examples of communities who have engaged in compassionate listening. The book concludes with a robust offering of exercises and practical tools that would be useful in any context for exploring difference, diversity, or impasse.



Compassionate Listening Practice

From
Listening with the Heart

Mutual Understanding through Meaningful Dialogue

My career has been built on trying to attain mutual understanding through meaningful dialogue.

For over two years I advocated for comprehensive immigration reform as the representative of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. Every week, I met with members of Congress and their staff to discuss the need for an immigration policy that respects the human dignity of our immigrant brothers and sisters.

During the summer of 2013 I was hopeful when a bi-partisan immigration reform bill passed in the Senate. Unfortunately, my hopes were dashed when House Republicans, led by Senator Jeff Sessions, rallied against the bill.

In my position, I often spoke with legislators that were either undecided or firmly against the policies I worked

to support. While it was frustrating, I learned that if I actively listened and tried to understand their perspectives, we could find mutual respect.

Over the years, I met with Senator Session's legislative director on a number of occasions. It was clear that no matter how much we talked, we did not agree on how to address immigration reform in the United States. I did learn that we both desired to reduce the economic factors that force people to leave their countries.

The Senator, just like the Sisters of Mercy, recognized that the free trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), directly resulted in more than a million undocumented immigrants entering the United States.

Although we were coming from different perspectives, we both desired to effectively address the root cause of undocumented immigration.

A year following Senator Session's mobilization against immigration reform in the House of Representatives, his legislative director and I worked together to prevent another free trade deal from being approved by Congress.

I've learned that no matter how much you may disagree with or dislike another person's viewpoint, if you work to build mutual respect, you can often find opportunities for collaboration and partnership.

▲ Ryan Murphy is the former Organizing Coordinator for the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Institute Justice Team. He is the current Washington State Director for the Working America Campaign.

Three Gates

Sufi's have a simple practice on listening and speaking.

Before one speaks they suggest that at the first gate ask, "Is it true?"

At the second gate ask, "Is it necessary?"

At the third gate ask, "Is it kind?"

It would be better to be silent than to utter words that had not passed through the three gates.

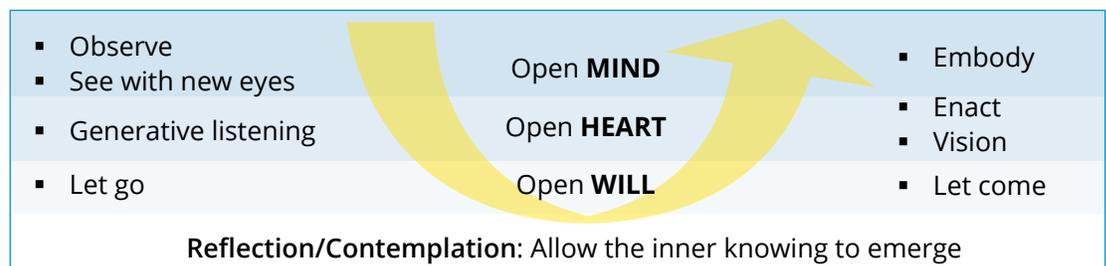
Presencing: Presence + Sensing

To activate deeper levels of leading and learning we need:

- An open **MIND**
- An open **HEART**
- An open **WILL**

Operating at a deeper level is often the road less traveled because we have three enemies:

- **Voices** of judgment blocks an open mind
- **Cynicism** blocks an open heart
- **Fear** blocks an open will



Scharmer's U is a living field theory that suggests that groups, organizations and communities can bring new reality into being. First, we move down the left side of the U with openness, seeing with new eyes, listening from the heart and letting go. As we come to the center of the U it becomes a

place of deep reflection and contemplative spaciousness that enables something new to emerge among us. Out of the place of stillness and co-presencing with one another we are ready to move up the right side of the U of co-creating new possibilities.

Reference: Theory U: Leading from the Future As It Emerges, by C. Otto Scharmer



INTERCOMMUNITY



IGNOCE TUS DERECHOS!

As a response to the Latino Community Dialogues that took place in Eastern and Western Washington in the fall, over 100 people participated in an interactive “Know your Rights” workshop. The goals included addressing the root causes of the fear that immigrants are experiencing and developing family and community plans for the issues that arise when they face Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE).

▶ Young Adult Justice Cafés



Vincentian Volunteers Alumni hold a Justice Café in St. Louis, MO

Join or Start a café!

Topic for March—Water

Contact Elizabeth at emurphy@ipjc.org!

“This cafe was so great. I’m happy to share these conversations with local peers.”
—Drew, Seattle Café

▶ Holy Names U

Linda Haydock, SNJM was a visiting Fellow at Holy Names University in February. The week kicked off with a Keynote entitled “Just Sustainability: For All to Thrive!” at the Social Justice Forum, followed by class presentations.

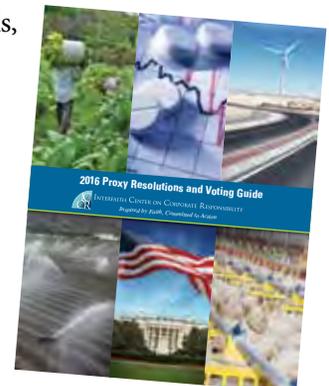


▶ Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment

Time to Vote Shareholder Proxies!

If you are looking for a practical tool to assist you in making your portfolio more sustainable, download the 2016 Proxy Resolutions and Voting Guide from the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) which contains the 257 shareholder resolutions filed by NWCRI and ICCR members. www.iccr.org/2016-proxy-resolutions-and-voting-guide

Climate change risks, lobbying, and political spending dominate as resolution themes with a record 91 resolutions either directly or indirectly referencing climate change. Shareholder proposals, which are designed to bring greater transparency, accountability, and sustainability to global business practices, address food safety and sustainability, water risks, health, human rights/human trafficking and board diversity. Be an active shareholder and vote your proxies. An abstention is counted as a vote for management.



28 gathered for a retreat called “Let Mercy In” Elizabeth Murphy led a session on “I’m Joyful and Spreading Joy.” The weekend was a collaboration among Jesuit ministry partners.

PEACE & JUSTICE CENTER

NEWS • ANNOUNCEMENTS • EVENTS

▶ Legislative Advocacy

Federal Advocacy

Visit the IPJC website to make your voice heard on refugees, gun control, human trafficking and more.



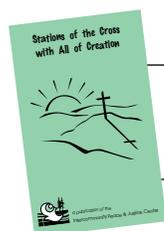
Catholic Advocacy Day 2016

We were over 600 strong with 131 appointments with our legislators to advocate for justice!



Spokane Advocacy Day

IPJC gave the keynote for the Eastern Washington Legislative Conference, "Our Call to the Common Good".



Stations of the Cross with all of Creation
With a **NEW** *Laudato Si'* supplement

▶ Donations

In honor of: Cele Gorman, OP, Maria Riley, OP, Monica Moffat, SNJM, Kit Eveits, Joan Kowalski, OP, The Gregory Family, Linda Haydock, SNJM, Mary Ellen Holohan, SNJM, Mariellen Blaser, SNJM, Jane Hibbard, SNJM, Kathleen Hilton, SNJM, Marcia Frideger, SNJM, Patricia Beattie, OP, Patricia Morisset, OP, Philomena McCarthy, OP, Madeleine Farrell, OP, Marilyn MacDonaugh, OP, and Kathleen Reilly, OP

In memory of: Maureen Carleton, Susan Dougherty, Mary Fleming, CSJP, and Peggy and Harvey Walters

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515 Madison St, Seattle, WA

6:00 p.m. Hors d'oeuvres, no host bar
7:00 p.m. Dinner

Dinner \$75

Invitations will be sent out mid-March!

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Setting

Create a hospitable gathering space with chairs in a circle, a table with a candle, a symbol of the topic and reflective music.

Participant Preparation

Convene a Listening Circle by inviting people with differing perspectives to join in a contemplative listening process. Identify a current issue: elections, racism, immigration, church etc.

Ask each participant to come prepared by reflecting and writing a 2-3 sentence response to the following questions:

- What do I need to learn about this topic?
- What inspires me and what challenges me?
- What question am I holding?
- What do I resist? What I am afraid to share with others?
- What is emerging in me as I consider the topic?

Gathering

After the introductions, take at least *15 minutes of communal contemplation*. Invite people to get comfortable, quiet their body and mind, be present to the still place within themselves, using the candle as a focal point if it is helpful.

Sharing

As you begin the sharing, ask each person to read their responses to the reflection questions (this enables people to remain focused and faithful to their prepared reflections). After each person shares, pause to silently honor the person's sharing. Then take just a moment for people in the circle to share a word or phrase of affirmation.

Quiet

After all have shared return to a few quiet moments for participants to consider:

- What was I feeling as I listened?
- What did I learn from others and about myself?
- What am I curious to explore with others?
- What inspired me or challenged me?

Conversation

Open the circle to a conversation with an emphasis on sharing rooted in the deep listening that has taken place.

Conclusion

Ask people to return to a minute of quiet and then to name a word of how they feel as they come to the conclusion of the Listening Circle. Explore if the group would like to reconvene.