The Art of the Good Listener

by Debra Trees, ARCWP

One could say that listening is an art, but did you know that there are many different styles of listening?

As an audiologist, I have always been interested in the basics of hearing well. For many years, I have practiced and promoted good listening techniques for all my patients and their families. Some of the basics of good communication, such as looking at the person while talking or getting their attention before speaking, just make common sense. Slowing down just a bit and using “whole body listening” are a few more tips. But it wasn’t until I began the pastoral care program through People’s Catholic Seminary (PCS) that I realized how complicated listening can be.

As ordained ministers, our calling will often single us out to be companions to others who are hurting or in grief, who need someone to hear them, for spiritual counsel or otherwise. Although we may not be able to represent ourselves professionally as licensed counselors, it is still important for us to witness with care.

According to some of the teachers of the PCS course Introduction to Pastoral Care, Reverend Lily Godsoe and Reverend Susan Shannon, there are many listening styles: deep listening, full listening, critical listening, therapeutic listening, and healing listening, to name a few. Working to understand and enhance our listening preferences is a life-long process.

How can we help ourselves be better listeners each day? Here are some suggestions to enhance our listening presence:

Become aware of our physical reality. Feet are flat on the floor. Become aware of our body in space: breath, feet, hands, senses, and boundaries. Grounding keeps us in the moment.

Become aware of what we are thinking. Put aside personal happy or difficult thoughts and attend to the person and situation in front of us.

Become aware of our own feelings and how we project them. Smiling, frowning, neutral face, and even body expression send unspoken messages.

Become aware of our purpose. Keeping our focus on acting with kindness allows us to witness in body and presentation. This is the key to self-awareness and self-love. Resting on this solid platform, we develop the capacity to give. From this stance of our personal listening presence, we can then provide a rich and engaging experience to others. We can be attentive, ask questions that matter, and be tuned into feelings and opportunities for sharing and compassion.

Whatever we do, enjoying a sense of continual learning is paramount to being the best we can be.

We can – and indeed must – develop the Art of the Good Listener in our lives!
Is Transubstantiation of the Eucharist Real or Symbolic?

by: Jill Striebinger, ARCWP

If Jesus passed the ability to heal to the apostles, and they went forward and did so, why is it now that ordinary parish priests do not know how to heal? Some “spiritual gurus,” Reiki practitioners, a cornucopia of healers, and traveling ministers sometimes tap into the Grace Vibration to assist others to heal, but why is it that the average parish priests aren’t taught healing nor have they any idea what it is? Perhaps they even frown upon healing or dismiss the reality of it? Why isn’t healing, in whatever capacity, the entire focus of a priestly role? Could it be that, through time and trauma, the institutional Catholic Church has lost the character of this grace through an over reliance on the written words of Church fathers and not the words etched in the heart by the Holy Spirit? Can God’s healing grace be recovered by priests? Or consider an ancillary question: can someone who is not a healer actually transubstantiate the Eucharist? Is symbolic transubstantiation sufficient for the miracle of transubstantiation to occur?

I can write a book on transubstantiation of the Eucharist, meaning the actual transformation of the essence of the communion bread and whether or not it actually changes or is merely symbolic. I would start with a big knot of questions wound tightly in a ball. There are so many tangents of queries going this way and that: is the new substance actually Christ or is it the priest’s interpretation of Christ? If the priest isn’t pure of heart, what happens inside the body of another which attempts to find Christ in all that it just took in? If the homily and theology make us cringe, what does an attempt to convert the bread make? If I absorb bread through my ears and stomach, is it a longer path to healing, a worsening of my own spiritual sickness? Do we all take on the individual priest’s sins to transform? The institution’s sins? Are we able to take in all this sin to cleanse if we are still working on our own hurt, pains, and sins, or are we receptacles extra storage space for the people we allow to be in charge so that they can continue to bypass their own inner work. . . . Oh! Did I just accidentally find the end of the string?

Is the fact that we congregants mindlessly receive by opening our ears and mouths, regardless of what our hearts are telling us, the reason the priests in the institutional church have not done their inner work?

Are we the congregants the reason that the Eucharist may be a transformed substance that has somehow moved off of center into something that resembles Christ yet does not act as Christ? Is this thinking a blaming of the victim? What is it we lose in this day and age if we do not participate in something that doesn’t feel right? What story am I telling myself about what God is? What work would we personally need to do and demand of our institution to elucidate this? There is so much to undo; this unraveling takes time.

Where does this leave us? Does it really matter if the Eucharist has changed form or is only symbolic if we do not believe that the person who interprets the gospel is of right mind, heart, and action?

This argument about the Eucharist wastes space and time. It takes us off topic. The question that we should be examining deeply is: are we consuming Christ by participating in an institution that does not act from right head, heart, and action? Are we ourselves love in loving action? Or are we following along with unloving acts that we are told lead to love? Does acting cruel, exclusionary, and controlling ever lead to love? Are we consistently ensuring that how we move in the world is loving at all stages? This is what we should be discussing. Not whether Christ is actually or symbolically present in the Eucharist. Here is the real question. Is Christ in our head, heart, and actions in the world?

. . . And just like Jesus’ mother, Mary, I would take communion from among the last, as well as the first, and accompany any one of them through their own fires should they decide to release, and open up to, a big Momma hug from a woman priest. . . .

Twenty years ago on June 29, 2002, seven courageous women boarded a boat on the Danube River in Passau, Germany and were ordained priests.

These women stood in the prophetic tradition of holy obedience to Spirit’s call to change an unjust law that discriminates against women. They began a global movement that altered two millennia of Catholic teaching prohibiting women’s ordination.

In 2022, the original seven have grown to almost 300 in 13 countries and 34 states.

Congratulations!

Jill Striebinger, ARCWP, is a priest and a Shinpiden Reiki Master. She attended People’s Catholic Seminary and has completed advocacy and peer advocate certifications through Parents in Partnership and Federation of Families. Jill holds a Master of Science in Management Information Systems, and her business background is in strategic, organizational, process, and system redesign. Jill is married to her wonderful husband, David, and is the mother of Eric, a beautiful angel. She volunteers as a parent advocate for other families with children who have autism.

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The Divine Half-Breed
By: Nori Kieran-Meredith, ARCWP

In 1520, Hernán Cortés and the Spanish conquer Mexico.

And it’s not just a physical conquest. The Spanish feel called to convert the Aztec “savages” to Christianity, too. The Aztecs form an underground resistance and, six years later, sacrifice a beautiful princess. Two incompatible ways of life come face to face. Violence and chaos erupt all over Mexico. Five years of carnage later, and the Aztecs are yearning with every fiber of their collective being for the intervention of their beloved mother goddess, Tonantzin.

It is 1531 and, as mothers do everywhere, Tonantzin hears the cry of her Aztec people and feels their anguish. To deal with her Spanish people, though, she must come to them in a form which both Spanish and Aztec will recognize. One which will give them pause before destroying one another.

Just months later, Mary of Nazareth appears to Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac in the saga of Guadalupe. She is dressed as an Aztec princess, and manifests as a mestiza, a half-breed. She is part indigenous, part Spanish. No one misses the symbolism of an Aztec princess impressed on the tilma, Juan Diego’s mantle; not the bishop, nor the indigenous peoples, nor even the arrogant Spanish. They all know who She is, without a doubt; Mary is Mother to all of them. She loves and cares for them equally, each and every one.

And, in one of the greatest sociological miracles of all time, the Spanish and the indigenous people embody the true miracle of Guadalupe. Unbelievably, they intermarry, as equals. The Mother of Social Justice has shown herself, and her people recognize her. She leads the way, and miracles follow!

And a side note here, compliments of Pope Francis. Not only is Mary a mestiza but, as mother of Christ, truly God and truly human, she makes God a mestizo, too. And so Jesus is indeed a half breed . . . ✪

From the Editor
By: Nori Kieran-Meredith, ARCWP

As so often before, this newsletter is comprised of a cornucopia of different themes. Our poets, ClareJulian Carbone and Anonymous, contribute short but rich gems of thought and passion. Ann Harrington fondly recalls some of her beloved homeless community. Deb Trees offers notes on various styles of listening. I offer reflections on Our Lady of Guadalupe, as embodied in that great Mexican film classic, La Otra Conquista. And Jill Striebinger mesmerizes and challenges us all in a column on transubstantiation. Truly an issue with something for everyone! ✪

Nori Kieran-Meredith, M. Div., mother and grandmother, is a member of the ARCWP on the ecumenical front.

JESU
By: ClareJulian Carbone, ARCWP

Jesus, make our eyes to
See the truth of what we’re doing.
Jesus, touch our hearts to
Change the path of where we’re going.

Jesus, of all the men who
Fought their way through blood to victory,
You showed, only the way through
Mercy and Love would set us free.

Mary, true and Blessed,
To all people you are Mother.
Lady of all the Nations,
Pray us back to one another.

Put down your swords, move towards each other.
See your neighbors, not your enemy.
Reach out your hand to one another.
Be the Peace you’re meant to be. ✪

ClareJulian Carbone, LCSW, ARCWP, is a therapist and spiritual director who resides and works in Salt Lake City. Ordained in 2015 with ARCWP, she is actively involved in interfaith dialogue, prayer, and friendship.
Tarboro Community Outreach Stories
By: Ann Harrington, ARCWP

One of my ministries is at a homeless shelter in nearby Tarboro, North Carolina. Once a week, I lead a prayer service there. It may be a scripture reflection, music, a video or Eucharist. I asked a few of my friends to share something about themselves and how they experience the prayer services.

Brenda was born at home in Edgecombe County. Six years ago, she retired from the local high school where she was as a custodian for 27 years. She loved her job and the high school kids. Her brother was one of the first people that Sister Mary Ann, Executive Director, served at Tarboro Community Outreach (“TCO”). He suffered a head injury when he was six and lived most of his life with his mother and sisters. Eventually, he wanted to be independent of them and moved into the TCO shelter. Brenda visited him, met Sister Mary Ann, and eventually became a volunteer. She also benefited from the food give-away days, making friends, and socializing. Brenda has had a lot of loss in her life. Her mother had a massive stroke one year before her brother died of stage 4 cancer. Her son was violently attacked for no discernable reason, and he died six months later. She said, “God brought me thorough and still brings me through.” Brenda says the prayer services are wonderful and wishes we could have them every day.

Ty was born in Rochester, Minnesota. In the 1980’s, he took a bus to the nearby city of Rocky Mount to find work. He eventually followed a woman to Tarboro. Ty has had two stints in prison. The first was for a DUI for which he was offered rehab over prison and chose prison. He made $1 a day mowing with a tractor, an assignment which he liked. In another prison, he was paid 43 cents an hour for agricultural work. When he was released, he walked out with $300. Ty loves the prayer services when he is able to attend. Most days he is doing yard work.

John Henry, whose names mean “precious gift from God” and “hard working and industrious” was born into dire poverty in South Carolina. He left home when he was nine years old and lived on his own till he was 22. It was at that age that he entered the prison system when he was arrested for murder and armed robbery. He was offered a plea deal that he thought would free him in a couple of years. Forty years later he was released. He says his time in prison was not a curse but a blessing for him. He developed a close personal relationship with God; it was heaven on earth for him. In time, he completed enough education to earn a BA in business management. He trusts God to provide what he needs and he is doing yard work.

Terry grew up in Washington, DC, he has spent much of his life in eastern Carolina. He has held a variety of jobs through the years – factory work, catering, and lastly as a nursing home meal supervisor, a position he loved. In particular, he enjoyed connecting with the residents. His mother taught him to cook and his great aunt influenced him markedly. Terry remembers fondly how she cooked breakfast every morning and dinner every evening. Due to his mother’s poor health, his great aunt raised him and his twin brother. Terry was very engaged in the services and clearly enjoyed them. I hadn’t seen Terry for about six weeks when, one day recently, he walked in, all dressed up. He said he was working on getting his driver’s license reinstated, and he came by to visit his friends. I was overjoyed to see him, and he invited me to the church he now attends. On May 22, he will be giving a witness. I told him I am honored to be invited, and I hope to attend.

My life has been very enriched by my ministry at TCO. I always leave feeling that I have received much more than I have given. ♦

Ann Harrington, wife, mother, grandmother, and ARCWP-ordained priest, is pastor of Free Spirit Inclusive Catholic Community. Her ministries include spiritual direction, interfaith dialogue, centering prayer, retreat leader, frequent letter-to-the-editor writer, and coordinator for the Greenville Advocacy Team.