



# CORNERSTONE

November 2023

## Listening and Loving

It is said that when the student is ready the teacher will appear. I found this to be true in prison ministry when an unexpected teacher appeared to show me the importance of listening.

Twenty years ago on a beautiful Sunday morning I was volunteering as chaplain in a jail out in the western suburbs. I was preparing to lead a typical Sunday morning prayer service in the chapel with around 30 inmates. Then a wonderful and sad moment occurred.

The moment began with a beloved tradition that was a part of each prayer service at the jail. I invited residents to write down their prayer concerns on

small scraps of paper, fold the papers up, and place them in the basket. The prayer concerns were collected at the beginning of the service.



During the service we would take the basket and pray in community for these intercessions written on the scraps of paper and then take them out to destroy them to maintain confidentiality.

As I was walking up the center aisle collecting those precious scraps of paper

that held the hopes and desires of those gathered, I noticed one fellow in the front row. He became my teacher that day. As he placed his scrap of paper into the basket we made eye contact, and I saw that he was crying. His tears were obvious and he looked quite sad.

So I bent over and asked him why he was crying—after all, we hadn't even begun the service yet. He shared with me that he had been in here (arrested and jailed) thirteen times, then he said, “I do not know how to get out.” He was a good-looking man in the prime of his life. I thought to myself, “Why is he stuck in this merry-go-round?”

*Continued on page 2*

### Inside this issue

2-Word From the Editor

3 - Conversations on the Road to Emmaus

4 - A Mother's Heart Needs No Language

5 - Parishioner in the spotlight: Jack Kirk

6 - Listening and Self Love

7 - Listening with Love

8 - For Your Reflection

So many thoughts went through my head, and my heart became weighed down with sympathy. What eventually happened to this man is a mystery to me, but is known to God. What happened to me was priceless and continues to impact me to this day.

Because I took a moment to see another man's tears and ask a question with openness and compassion, I began to learn about recidivism (the tendency to reoffend). Listening led to learning, which helped me to serve others with more love and understanding.

The seeds of listening were planted by my mother. She grew up in a small town where the tendency was for Catholics not

to intermingle with people of other faith traditions. Her mother, my grandmother, did not like that tendency. She taught my mother to accept the other kids in town, regardless of their faith tradition. My mother passed this same commitment of openness to others onto me. I believe that her example is part of what led me to find myself leading a Sunday morning prayer service in a jail. Her example is part of what helped me to look deeply into the eyes of someone whose identity and experiences were so different than mine, to recognize he had something to teach me, and to seek to understand.

- Deacon Joe Frederick



## A word from the editor

"I didn't realize I knew that until I said it out loud just now!"

This is a sentence that I have both spoken myself and heard spoken by another in the context of spiritual direction. As a spiritual director, I am blessed to accompany others one on one and bear witness to their lives in prayer, experiences of faith, and the movement of God in their lives. And as someone who has received spiritual direction for years, I have benefitted greatly from the expansive, attuned listening and loving presence of my spiritual directors.

Often it is only when generous listening is offered that we can truly say what needs to be said. When a caring, open question is given, along with ample space to respond, we find ourselves articulating something new, becoming able to name insights, questions, fears, and desires that we have never before spoken aloud. New knowledge is listened into being and we sense God's presence. It is holy ground, indeed.

Though this quality of listening is deeply needed in our world, it takes skill and discipline to cultivate. I am often tempted to multitask, convincing myself I can listen and do something else at the same time. Or I start inserting my own experience into what the other is saying, rather than just receiving them. Rather than listening, I can focus instead on how I will respond, simply waiting until it's my turn to talk again.

The reflections in these pages speak about the sacred art of listening and how it is connected to loving. I hope they inspire us all to grow in our discipleship, offering Christ-like listening and love to a world in need.

- Rhonda Miska, Communications Director

# Conversation on the Way to Emmaus

*British Dominican Father Timothy Radcliffe preached a retreat for those participating on the Synod on Synodality assembly. The retreat was intended to prepare delegates to share in spiritual conversation on topics related to communion, participation, and mission. The following is an excerpt from a reflection he gave on Monday, October 2 in Sacrofano, Italy. The full text of this reflection can be found online at [www.vaticannews.va](http://www.vaticannews.va).*



If we too step out into the light and let ourselves be seen as we are, we shall find words for each other...

If we *really* listen, our ready-made answers will evaporate. We will be silenced and lost for words, as Zechariah was before he burst into song. If I do not know how to respond to my sister or brother's pain or puzzlement, I must turn to the Lord and ask for words. Then the conversation can begin.

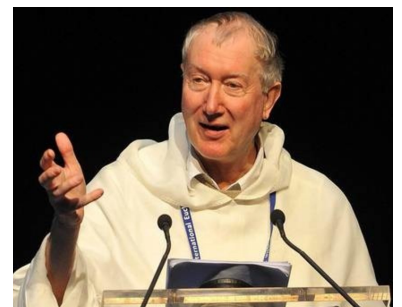
Shared words are the lifeblood of our Church. We need to find them for the sake of our world in which violence is fueled by humanity's inability to listen. Conversation leads to conversion.

How should conversations begin? In Genesis after the Fall, there is a terrible silence. The silent communion of Eden has become the silence of shame. Adam and Eve hide. How can God reach across that chasm? God waits patiently until they have clothed themselves to hide their embarrassment. Now they are ready for the first conversation in the Bible. The silence is broken with a simple question: 'Where are you?' It is not a request for information. It is an invitation to step out into the light and stand visibly before the

Conversation needs an imaginative leap into the experience of the other person. To see with their eyes, and hear with their ears. We need to get inside their skin. From what experiences do their words spring? What pain or hope do they carry? What journey are they on?

...If we can discover the pleasure of imagining why our sisters and brothers hold views we find odd, then a new springtime will begin in the Church. The Holy Spirit will give us the gift of speaking other languages.

- Father Timothy Radcliffe, OP





## A Mother's Heart Needs No Language

In 2010 I participated in a sister parish delegation trip to show solidarity with the community of Tierra Nueva II in Guatemala, Central America. I stayed with a host family which included a mother and two daughters. My husband Joe and I were on this delegation together but Joe was staying with another family. As I look back, I can see God's providence in how this worked out—God is definitely in the details!

I noticed that there was an altar on one wall of the house with a large photo of a young man. There were multiple other photos with this man in them around the house, and there were lit candles and flowers, as well. On the second morning with this family, I, in my very limited Spanish, asked the mother who this young man was.

She began to pour out her heart to me with deep sobs. The only words I was able to pick up were son, bus, murder. No other words were necessary. I am a mother of three sons and

this woman had lost her son, in the prime of his life, on a city bus. My heart and her heart were as one. She continued to talk and tell me the details...I stopped trying to understand her Spanish words and only listened with my heart, filled with compassionate connection. It was more intimate than if I had known her language.



God is like this. I only need to unite my heart to His in love, pain, sorrow and joy. The Holy Spirit provides the needed words. Romans 8:26 says that “the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with

inexpressible groanings.” There is a communication that is deeper and more significant than words shared in a common language.

I often reflect on this encounter in Guatemala. I find that, if I keep my mouth shut, there are so many stories of the heart to be shared with one another. We are sojourners on this earthly journey together.

- *Therese Frederick*



## Parishioner in the Spotlight: Jack Kirk

Jack Kirk and his wife Deb have been parishioners at the Church of St. Timothy for 23 years. He grew up in Staples, Minnesota, about 30 miles west of Brainerd, and moved to the Twin Cities area to study at the University of Minnesota.

Jack and Deb have two children and five grandchildren, all of whom live in the greater metro area.

Before retiring five years ago, Jack had a long career in parks and recreation. “I worked in the field for 42 years. I served as Director of Parks and Recreation in the City of Fridley,” he said.

He has a long history of involvement in Catholic faith communities. “I’ve been a member of the Knights of Columbus for 51 years—I joined my freshman year in college,” he recalled.

Jack has served as a lector for about twelve years at the Church of St. Timothy, and knew he wanted to get more involved at the church after he retired.

At Deacon Tom Quayle’s invitation, Jack joined the morning prayer group that meets on Zoom. “It’s all because Deacon Tom personally asked me to join. It’s a nice group,” he said.

“Then, during time and talent weekend, I looked through list of opportunities. Something told me that the BeFrienders was something I should do. Since it was during Covid, it was a strange time. The BeFrienders weren’t going out and seeing

people, and everything was on hold,” he recalled.

BeFrienders are trained parishioners who offer a compassionate, listening presence to those who are facing loss, transition, or challenge.

In spite of the unusual circumstances, Jack signed up, completed the training, and was eventually assigned a couple to visit as a BeFriender.

“Being a BeFriender has impacted me. It has made me aware of how many people deal

with struggles. Sometimes we think we are the only one who is struggling, but there are a lot of people out there who can use someone to walk the journey with them. It makes me more compassionate and more prayerful,” Jack said about his three years as a BeFriender.

“Being a BeFriender minister has deepened my faith and helped me to understand the call to service as Catholics in a new way. Christ is our example. He washed feet, he ministered to the sick and the poor.”

Relationships are at the heart of Jack’s involvement at St. Timothy’s. “The relationships with other BeFrienders and with those I befriend are very rewarding. At our parish, people are so welcoming and friendly. I hope other people find that, as well. Those relationships are the reason anyone stays in a group. For me, those connections have been really good here.”



## Listening and Self Love

We all have times in our life when we need professional help with problems that we can't figure out or solve ourselves. If I had a physical pain or injury, I wouldn't hesitate to go to a medical doctor for answers and treatment.

However, when we feel emotional pain, stress, worry, confusion, and overload, all too often we hesitate to seek help of a mental health professional. People might ask us how we are and we quickly say that we are fine. It can be tempting to just keep the pain, trauma, and confusion inside instead of sharing it. Because of stigma and shame, we may feel that people won't understand, so we push down our feelings inside and try to live a "normal" life.

Thirteen years ago, my husband Greg was dealing with some serious health issues. We went from one doctor and hospital after another searching for answers and a plan of treatment. It was during that time that fear and doubt filled my mind and spirit. It seemed that prayers weren't being answered. I wondered where God was in the huge puzzle. I felt alone. Greg was in no condition to understand my worries. How could he? He was not comprehending much at this time.

One day as I was volunteering at St. Timothy's as a funeral minister, Shawn, who served as pastoral minister at the time, mentioned his concern for me as I relayed to him the latest search for medical answers for Greg. Shawn asked me what I was doing for me and for my health and spirit. I recall mumbling that I was okay, that I was fine. And I really thought I was. But as tears

flowed, I realized that I wasn't okay! Tears flowed and Shawn listened to me. He recommended that I see Nate, a therapist who saw clients at St. Timothy's at the time. Thankfully, I trusted Shawn and I could receive his concern for me. I connected with Nate soon after that conversation.

It's been thirteen years since that conversation with Shawn, and I still see the value of having a skilled and compassionate professional listener in my life. Having a listener like Nate has helped me through a variety of situations, including my own health issues, the death of three siblings, and other times of anxiety and stress. Having a listener has helped me to achieve self-acceptance, healing, comfort, and strength. In my case, my therapist has similar faith beliefs and he has helped me to discover that God was right there in the midst of all the confusion. The Serenity Prayer with all the verses has become a prayerful, powerful tool that helps me find acceptance in challenging life circumstances.

So with Nate's help and God's help, I am fine! I am a work in progress, I am loved, and I am grateful to have been heard with care and compassion as I heal.

If you are in a place of pain and confusion as I was, take heart. You are not alone.

There are people who can offer you caring, compassionate listening and can accompany you in your difficulties.

- Kathy Piche





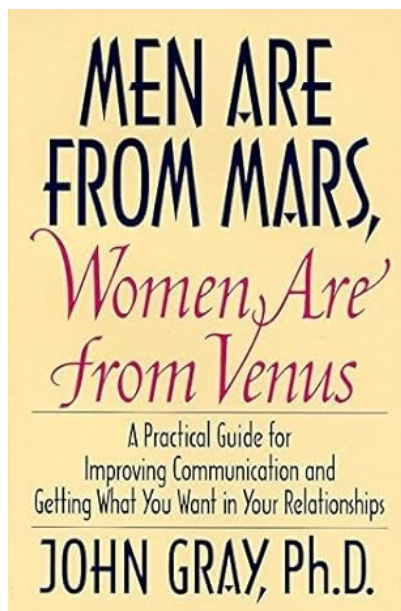
## Listening with Love

Growing up in an active family of ten children, there were lots of distractions. I had to study for school regularly and loved to read books, so I needed a way to shut out the noise. Sometimes listening to music did the trick. I believe the term “selective hearing” accurately describes how I tuned out the noise so that I could focus.

The ability to tune out and to tune in has been important in my life. “Active listening” is something I have worked on with my computer networking clients to better meet their needs. It’s a skill that has also been helpful with my MetroState University students to understand their questions and prepare them for work in today’s organizations.

Active listening has been especially important in my relationship with my wife Nancy. We met at St. Timothy’s widowed, separated and divorced group which used to gather on Monday evenings. I had been attending for several months when Nancy and I ended up in the same small group of about a dozen people. The small group

discussion centered around the book Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus which was popular at the time. I was listening closely to the comments she made, and it seemed like she was “in my head.”



When I met Nancy, she had a demanding and exciting job as a meeting planner and recommender for yearly, national trade shows that brought together several hundred customers. She was quite a professional speaker. In her past, there were times when the men she was with had a hard time “keeping up” with her train of thought.

Though the group where we met was for support for those experiencing loss and transition, and it wasn’t

meant to be a place to find a date or a potential relationship, I truly wanted to get to know Nancy better after that small group discussion. As it happened, we married two years later.

I have found that I *do* keep up with Nancy’s conversations. Any of you reading this who know her can attest that her train of thought moves quickly and covers a wide range of topics. Lately, as we sit in our office at opposite sides of the desk, I find myself closing my laptop so I can be present and actively aware of her ideas. If we are reading our tablets in bed before sleep-time, I turn my tablet over so she knows I am listening.

Recently she complimented me on exhibiting that skill and repeated that I am able to “keep up with her.”

Is it possible that I am listening with my heart? Thank you, God, for this ability to be present to the person I love the most. Hopefully it carries over to others I meet.

- Tim Downey



## For Your Reflection

Deacon Joe wrote of how noticing someone's nonverbal communication and asking a question led to a significant insight. How might you be more attentive to the nonverbal communication of others, especially those who are closest to you?

Tim Downey describes putting down his tablet and closing his laptop to be more present to his wife and offer the gift of active listening. Are you called to resist the pull to multitasking and more fully offer the gift of your listening presence to others?

Therese Frederick reflected on a meaningful cross-cultural experience where connection happened even without a common language. When have you been able to know and be known by someone even when there was a language barrier or some other challenge?

For Kathy Piche, having a skilled and compassionate professional listener is part of how she practices love of self so she can more fully and freely love God and others. How does love of yourself relate to love of God and others in your life?

Father Timothy Radcliffe, OP wrote that "conversation needs an imaginative leap into the experience of the other person." Is there a person you struggle to understand or relate to? How might you try to make this "imaginative leap" to help you listen to them in a new way?

Jack Kirk describes the significance of his relationships and connections at the Church of St. Timothy. How do you feel about the relationships and connections you have with others in our parish? How might you reach out and extend kindness and welcome to others in our parish community who might be seeking greater connection?

### CORNERSTONE

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Editor Emeritus: Tim Downey

**Church of St. Timothy mission:** We are a progressive, welcoming Catholic community that values full participation in worship and community service. We commit to being a peace-loving, Eucharistic community providing integrated faith formation and applying gospel values to daily living.

*"You are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone." (Ephesians 2:20)*



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