

Diocese of Fredericton - Layreaders' Day - April 20, 2024

Pastoral Visitation for Lay Readers - Practicing the gift of presence

Introduction

We are gathered together today to begin the journey toward visiting and connecting to people who invite us into their story and into their lives. I have seen many lonely people through the years of counselling and as necessary counselling is for people at different times in their lives, what is needed, and what is more sustainable, are people who care and offer themselves to connect and comfort. We wish to bring the comfort and caring of God to people we visit.

This mandate from Bishop David, is a wonderful chance to be available to offer connection to people, to help them feel less alone, to care, and to comfort. I wonder how you come today and how you anticipate your own level of both opportunity and concern as with this mandate come both of these — opportunity, excitement and concern — even a danger for us.

Reflection. Can take a few minutes and consider how this invitation to visit can be both an opportunity and a danger? What comes to mind for you. When you have a few impressions and ideas, talk to 3-4 around you and write down your groups thoughts on visitation and how it can be both an opportunity, danger or concern. What do you need to have this become a wonderful opportunity for caring, and comforting others?

Let's, through this workshop, begin to be equipped so we can make this a wonderful opportunity to connect, comfort and care for those your visit in your parish.

Preparation

Let's begin by using this Scripture as a beginning focus. **II Corinthians 1:4**, 'He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.' NLT

Our purpose is to bring the comfort of our God, which we have experienced in our sorrow, loneliness, pain, loss, discouragement, rejection, harm and then we pass on our experiences of being comforted and our renewed hope, dreams, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, etc., to those we visit.

Reflection. How does God comfort? How have you been comforted by God? Write your thoughts down and then share with others in groups of 3-4. Compile your answers as a group and appoint a reader to present to the assembly.

Ultimately we are comforted by God when we learn to hear the whisper that says to us; 'I love you.' For only that can make you whole.¹

This can happen in many situation but the primary ways we hear 'I love you' are through prayer — in solitude and silence, through the word of God, through the sacraments, through worship, and in community.

¹ Rolheiser, Ronald. *Prayer, Our Deepest Longing*. Franciscan Media, Cincinnati, OH. 2013. page ix.

But the most available to us and to others is through prayer. We pray primarily in two ways; Private or Affective pray and Corporate or Priestly pray^{2,3}

Prayer

Scripture focus; **Matthew 6:6**, ‘But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.’ NIV

Private prayer, in silence and solitude, is listening and hearing the ‘still small voice’ of God. We rest in Him and begin to understand and experience the reality of; Romans 8:16 ‘For His Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children.’

Another purpose of entering your closet to hear God say; ‘I love you,’ and ‘you are my child,’ is to have him search our hearts — we need to get our house in order and do some ‘housecleaning’ so we can be present with people we visit.

Scripture focus; **Psalms 139:23**, ‘Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.’ We ask God to search us and we listen. NIV

“...the first task is one of housecleaning, of creating our own inner order. We must know ourselves well, both our dark corners and our airless places — the spots where dust collects and mold begins to grow...we must clean our house, and then keep cleaning it so that we have a worthy place when we invite others to rest and refreshment.”⁴

² Ibid, page 27.

³Corporate prayer is by nature public praying for others and the needs of the world. This will also be part of our purpose in visiting. What we can bring to God in pray will depend on what we hear, understand, and what is needed for comforting.

⁴ Guenther, Margaret. *Holy Listening, The Art of Spiritual Direction*. Cowley Publications. Lanham, Maryland. 1992. Pg11.

Reflection. Has this been your experience? Can you recall experiences where you felt the love of God? How have you experienced this through private prayer? How do you enter into your closet or room and close the door? Has God helped you to do some ordering our your life? Write your thoughts down and then share with others in groups of 3-4.

When we are comforted by God we settle and develop an awareness of people needing care in our family, friends and our parish.

Scriptural focus; **1 Peter 5:2**, ‘Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;” NIV

Our purpose is to bring the comfort of God - His presence — to others and to Care for those we are visiting.

Care

What does it mean to Care?

One definition of caring is ‘both a persistent attitude towards persons and concrete acts.’⁵

Caring as an attitude — like compassion — is; ‘somehow to suffer or grieve with someone, to carry a burden for or along with the person, to be troubled alongside another.’⁶

It is done in an attitude of humility.

⁵ Switzer, David. *Pastoral Care Emergencies, Ministering to People in Crisis*. Paulist Press, Mahwah, New Jersey 1989, pg13.

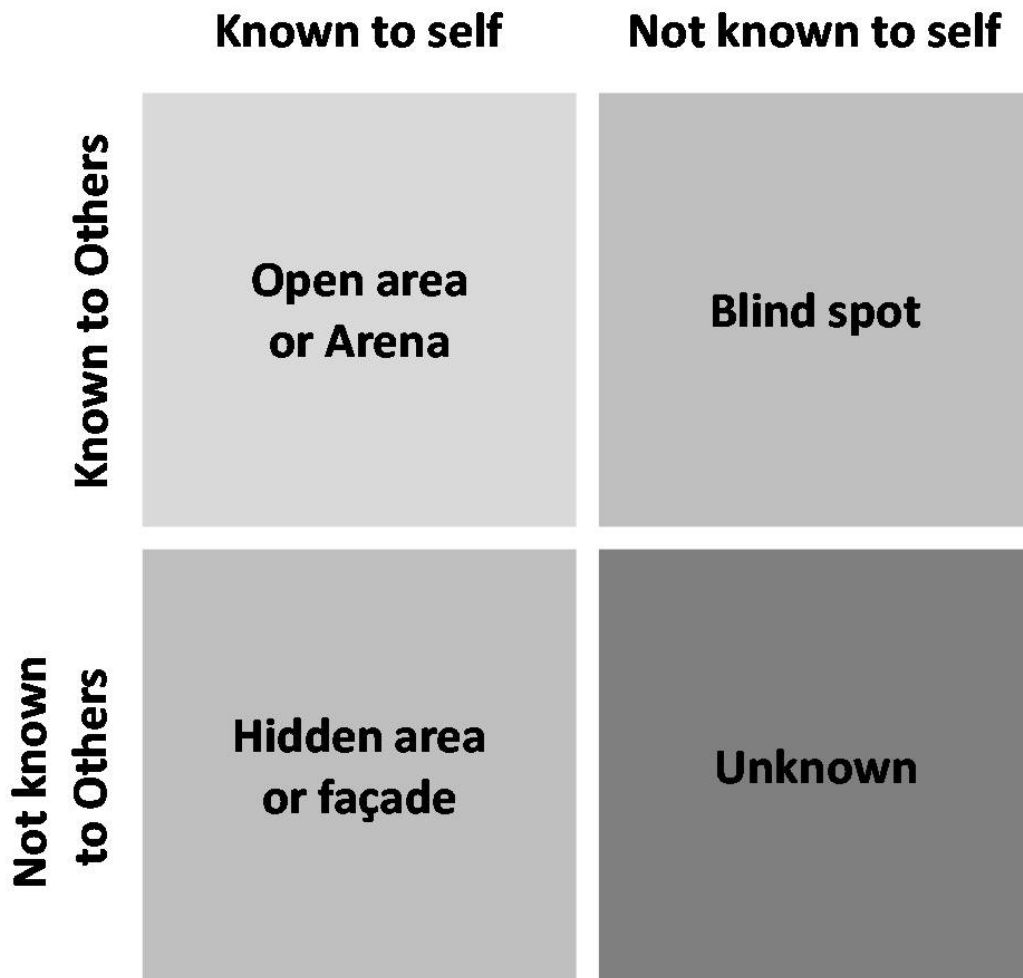
⁶ Ibid, page 17.

Scripture focus; **Ephesians 4:1-3**; 'As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.' NIV

Caring is also Concrete Acts.

What are these concrete acts that we bring and give when we visit? What level of competence do we need to bring Comfort and Care?

Genuineness - Being self aware



The Johari Window Model

One of the greatest gifts we give is be ourselves and to be self aware. When we visit someone we need to be genuine not having any pretence. We need to know ourselves. We need to know the areas of our lives we can share, areas that are vulnerable, areas that we can relate to in others and areas we can either under-relate — as we have no knowledge of, or have any experience with. We can also over-relate with very emotional experiences that we have not work through completely ourselves may cause us to self focused. This leaves us vulnerable to ‘flooding’ an emotional fight, flight, freeze, or faint automatic response.

The Johari window may help us understand ourselves and help us to be more self-aware. It was developed by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham in 1955.

Being genuine means that we are consistent and congruent with ourselves and others. When we are people begin to trust. We enlarge the area of — ‘known to others ad known to self.’

We give Worth - Time and Attention

By your very presence you are giving time — unhurried, undistracted, focused time. We are warm — smile and look at the person. We pay attention to the story and listen. What may distract you?

We listen - for emotions, which may be words or body language. We also listen to what is said — the content and the story. Develop emotional words to understand.

We give the gift of Understanding - accurately understanding is articulating the meaning of what is happening in the lives of those we visit. Remember to be understood is to be Home. A wonderful gift to give.

Reflection. What has your experience been of being cared for? What was it like for you? Can you identify with any of the elements of caring reviewed? I want you to talk to

your group about your week. I want the group to 'care' for the speaker and seek to understand the meaning of what has been said. Take turns.

Summary

1. We offer comfort as we have experienced God comforting us.
2. We seek God through prayer in our 'closet' to hear his voice of affirmation.
3. We seek God to help 'order our lives.'
4. We care — with humility and action.
5. We learn to listen and accurately understand the heart of the people we care for.
'Being understood is being home.'

Closing

Let's read together:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy;

O. Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Benediction

Be held in the center of God's will today and know the joy, freedom, and power of walking by faith and in faithfulness. Amen.⁷

Notes:

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⁷ Job, Rueben P., Shawchuck, Norman. *A Guide to Prayer*. The Upper Room. Nashville Tennessee.1983