



Paths to Conversion

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Metanoia and conversion are words that we are very familiar with in our Franciscan journey. Books have been written about this change of heart, this change of life and each saint has his or her own story to leave behind. In fact, the ways to conversion are as numerous, as the persons who set out on this journey. Recently, I heard a talk by Fr. Michael Himes, S.J. who suggested conversation, as a path to conversion. I was intrigued by the similarity of the words and consulted Merriam-Webster for their etymologies: they both emerged from Middle English in the 14th century, and both are traced from Latin the *conversation-*, *conversatio*, from *conversari* to associate with, of *convertere* to turn around.

How does this fit into formation? First and foremost, all formation is conversation and is open to many points of view. Conversation, any good conversation, offers us the opportunity to grow and change, if we but enter into it with an open mind. We must be willing to listen to the ideas of the other without judging them and by accepting these ideas for what they are, information. Then we must ask ourselves what parts of this information is new to me. How does this new information confirm my way of thinking? Does it challenge me to expand or change my long held beliefs?

The interesting aspect of conversation as a path to conversion is that conversation is such a normal part of our existence. We have conversations everyday with persons of different ages, genders, cultures and ideologies. Each of these has something to share with us; we need not agree, but our willingness to listen informs us.

What is necessary for true conversation to take place?

- Always be respectful of the person we are speaking with and remember that their point of view is as valuable to them, as yours is to you.
- Listen without being judgmental.
- Don't form your response until after the person has finished speaking, and you've

had time to digest what the other has said.

- State your point of view, trying not to be argumentative.
- Use "I" statements, a basic skill in conversation; it keeps the other from going on the defensive. For example, "I hear what you are saying, but I disagree with your opinion because . . ."
- Seek points of agreement to continue the conversation.
- Continue the train of conversation rather than jumping in with a contrary opinion.
- If at the end of your conversation, you still have different points of view, do not go away dismayed, but agree to disagree.

So as a step on this path to conversion, seek out someone whose point of view is different from your own and enter into conversation. Discover how this engagement either challenges you to grow or further strengthens your own beliefs. Take up "conversation as a path to conversion" as a fraternal activity. Bring your new findings to the fraternal gathering and share. You may all grow from these encounters with persons whose views seem different from yours – or you may discover that you have a great deal in common – another point of growth.

Brother Juniper



By Fred McCarthy, SFO