



JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



ARE YOU A MINDFUL COMMUNICATOR?

By Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, National JPIC Animator

Have you ever been engaged in a dialogue with someone only to realize s/he did not really comprehend what you were saying? Have you ever witnessed or heard something one way, only to discover the intended meaning was totally opposite of what you thought? Have you ever been in a conversation with someone for several minutes without really hearing what the other person said because you were rehearsing your response?

If you answered YES to these questions, take heart, you are not alone. Miscommunication is universal to the human experience and happens more often than we would like to admit. Miscommunication can lead to misunderstandings; which happens when the receiver understands a message differently from what the sender intended. Consider this cleaning service advertisement: "Tired of cleaning yourself? Let me do it." Or this used car ad: "Used Cars: Why go elsewhere to be cheated? Come here first!" These may be humorous examples, but the point is the same. What the writer intended and what the reader understood are undoubtedly two different things.

In our fraternal and familial lives, the consequences of such miscommunication can be damaging and divisive. We tend to shy away from anything that can lead to conflicts or misunderstandings. We would rather stay with our assumptions instead of asking questions to gain clarity and understanding. This leads to more miscommunication and more division. Asking questions can build bridges of understanding and lead to greater clarity and better communication. Once you ask those clarifying questions, you must then listen for the answer.

Think about the number of people Jesus encountered in the Gospels who he asked what they wanted Jesus to do for them. Now, being the Son of God, I am sure Jesus already knew what these folks wanted: the blind wanted sight, the lame wanted healing, and the lepers wanted to be made clean as to be re-integrated into society. But Jesus still asked them what they wanted

him to do for them. Asking questions gains greater clarity and also validates the person being asked. It gives them the opportunity to express their needs and share what is on their heart. Once Jesus asked, he listened. Good communication is a two-way street of speaking and listening. Remember, God gave us mouths that close and ears that don't. Two ears and one mouth means we must listen twice as much as we speak.

I invite you to ask yourself "How can I become a better communicator?" My response: speak and listen more mindfully. Strive to become a more mindful communicator. Do not make assumptions. THINK before you speak. Listen without judgment or rebuttal. Ask engaging questions to gain clarity and understanding. The best question you can ask when in an intense dialogue is, "*What do you need me to understand right now?*" Then listen for the answer; listen to understand and not to fix or convict. This gets even trickier when there are different languages or cultures involved.

At the JPIC Animate Peace Gathering this summer, we will discuss using mindful and nonviolent communication to build bridges of clarity, understanding and unity. Statistics show that miscommunication is one of the biggest culprits to conflicts and division. Come and learn the art of mindful listening and how to ask questions that clarify, not vilify. The Gathering is July 27 – 30, 2017 in St. Louis, Mo. For more information, please email Carolyn at ctownes26@hotmail.com.

