



MODULE 4 FACILITATOR’S GUIDE: Unconditional Listening through Difficult Conversations

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MODULE GOALS

- To help the listener become comfortable with the listening process that empowers her to be present to the dialogue.
- To help the listener recognize patterns and assumptions that create obstacles to better understanding.
- To raise the awareness of the listener and share a process that intends to move a group toward a common understanding that creates a collective action for the common good.
- To remind the listener that listening is a sacred act.

WELCOME AND BRIEF CHECK-IN (5 MINUTES)

CENTERING PRAYER (10 MINUTES)

Facilitator signals the beginning of prayer using a song, chime, or quiet invitation. When all are settled, read the following instructions.

- Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
- Sit comfortably and with your eyes closed, settle briefly, and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
- When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
- When I signal the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with your eyes closed for a couple of minutes as I read from our maxims and from scripture.

Facilitator signals the end of silence using a song, chime, or a quiet invitation. After a few beats of silence, read the following:

Maxim 6: Put aside your old self... so that you can put on the new" (Eph. 4:22-24), and accordingly lead a life dead to the world and to self-love, full of gentleness, humility of heart, true sincerity, modesty, interior and exterior peace, and of charity toward the neighbor; in a word, (a life) completely modeled on the holiness and the pleasing virtues of

Jesus which you should develop in yourself. Thus you can by grace draw many people who will profit by your example and your conversations.

Maxim 41: Tend solely and lovingly to resemble the dear Savior perfectly and in all things. Let him live in you and you in him.

Scripture: James 1:19

Know this, my dear brothers: everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

Scripture: Luke 2:46

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

SHARING THE STATE OF THE HEART (20-30 MINUTES)

Enter into a quiet, contemplative sitting position to reflect on these questions; then briefly share what has been given to you during this time of reflection.

- How has God been revealed to you since our last gathering?
- How has that changed you?

Facilitator brings Sharing the State of the Heart to closure, honoring what has been shared. Then facilitator plays video for Module 4.

VIDEO FOR MODULE 4 (20 MINUTES)

After the DVD presentation, facilitator reads the following, then invites the group to discuss the questions below.

“When you listen generously to people, they can hear the truth in themselves, often for the first time.” Rachel Naomi Remen

In the previous session we worked through the concept of stereotypes. We know we often stereotype people and things into easy to identify categories. While this is a useful function

of the brain to process large amounts of information into manageable chunks, it can lead to unfair assumptions, inaccurate judgments, and ultimately harmful behaviors. From our time exploring the charisma and worldview, we have also become aware that our language is filled with ambiguous and value-laden terms that hold strong personal meanings. Hold these questions as you move through the exercises together.

- Upon reflection, can you recall a time when you listened through the lens of your stereotype or assumption of someone instead of hearing what they were actually trying to share with you?
- How might that have changed the quality of your listening?

REVIEW TYPES OF LISTENING (5 MINUTES)

Facilitator passes out copies of the [handout on the Types of Listening](#), which can be found at the end of this packet. As the group reviews the handout together, Facilitator invites participants to recall times when they have engaged in those various types of practice.

- Active
- Reflective
- Empathetic
- Unconditional

EMMAUS WALK (30-45 MINUTES)

Facilitator invites all of the group members to find a partner and then reads the following instructions.

As a pair, please find a quiet spot to sit or you may choose to take a walk together instead. Partners take turns answering the following questions. Please limit yourself to about three minutes per question per person. Listeners, your job is to listen; please try to avoid conversation at this point. Both of you should answer each question before moving to the next question.

- What is a time I have felt really listened to?
- What was a time that I felt like I listened really well?
- What was a time when I felt unheard?

- What was a time I wish I had listened better?

Facilitator uses a song, reading or chime to call participants back to the group. Re-center the group with a few moments of silence.

LARGE GROUP SHARING (45 MINUTES)

Facilitator encourages the group to share using the following questions. Not everyone needs to speak, but offer some time for anyone who would like to offer insights or awarenesses that were made evident.

- What type of listening am I most comfortable practicing? Why?
- What was most challenging about sharing during the Emmaus Walk?
- What was most challenging about listening?
- What emotions did I experience in sharing this about myself?

DESCRIBE ME (45 MINUTES)

Items needed for this exercise:

- Various object d'art, knick knacks, or unusual items
- Drawing paper
- Pencils and/or colored pencils

Purpose:

To help the group understand how challenging it is to listen for understanding when language and assumptions limit us.

Facilitator divides everyone into small groups of three or four people. Each group identifies one Speaker, and the remaining participants will be Listeners/Artists.

Privately, away from their group, the Facilitator gives each Speaker an object to examine. The Speaker should look at its dimension, purpose, material, and coloring, and decide how to

describe it to the Listeners/Artists in a way that they can draw it without knowing what it is. The Speaker should leave the object in a place where it cannot be seen by their group and return to the group to begin her description. (Optionally, the objects could be kept in shoeboxes so that Speaker can carry them with them to look at them without the group being able to see them.)

Speakers cannot explicitly say what the object is. They can use descriptive terms and generalities to help guide the Listeners/Artists. For example, if someone were given a pencil (too easy of an object), she might say that it is about eight inches long and a quarter inch wide, that it is made of wood and painted yellow, that it has a black graphite core, and that it is used for writing and erasing.

The Listeners/Artists' job is to listen to the Speaker and try to picture the object they are describing, draw it, and share the drawing with the Speaker for confirmation. They may ask clarifying questions about size, color, details, use, materials, and cultural context.

Once the Speaker and Listeners/Artists feel they have gotten as far as they can together, the speaker may reveal the object. If time allows, repeat the process with a new Speaker.

Facilitator calls the group back to a large group discussion of the following questions.

- What was the most challenging part of being the Speaker?
- How did you feel about having limitations put on you as you were trying to describe your object?
- What was the most challenging part of being the Listener?
- Did any groups have a member who simply could not “see” what was being described? If yes, how was that handled?
- Did stereotypes and language play a role in your listening? If so, how? If not, why?
- How might this activity inform our understanding of the challenges of unconditional listening beyond stereotypes?

GUIDED DISCUSSION FROM THE READINGS (45-60 MINUTES)

From the silence, speak only if you feel called to respond to any of the excerpts and queries below. This is not a time for conversation, but for a deeper sharing of understandings revealed. Once someone has shared, allow for space, then others can continue to speak if prompted by the Spirit. After all have shared, if there is time and the group feels compelled, more discussion may be desired.

Facilitator reads the following:

- Pope Francis recalls us to Jesus' practice of "seeing beyond [another's] weaknesses and failings. He invites all of us to learn the 'art of accompaniment' which "heals, liberates and encourages growth."

If we practice unconditional listening with one another and especially those who challenge us, how might we heal, liberate, and grow personally and collectively?

- In José Rodríguez Carballo, O.F.M.'s *Rejoice!*, he writes,

"People today certainly need words, but most of all they need us to bear witness to the mercy and tenderness of the Lord, which warms the heart, rekindles hope, and attracts people towards the good. What a joy it is to bring God's consolation to others!"

When and why do we find accompaniment or listening to not be enough? In reflecting on our Emmaus Walk, what was most powerful about being truly heard and truly hearing another? What would our communities and world look like if we lived from this place?

- Walter Brueggemann writes that "now it is time not for answers but for questions that defy answers." When structures and systems are failing we can no longer rely upon them to solve the problems they created.

How might unconditional listening move us toward living and being something new? How do we know when asking and listening is enough?

GATHERING THE GRACES (5-10 MINUTES)

Reflect on the following questions:

- What have I heard?
- What am I learning?
- What difference will it make for me tomorrow and the day after that and beyond?
- What difference does it make for us as the community of St. Joseph?

Each participant may share ONE brief awareness/learning from today's process.

Take a few minutes to record in your journal:

- What awareness has the group gained during this time?
- What wisdom needs to be recorded and carried into the next session?

CLOSING PRAYER

Facilitator invites everyone to reflect silently for a moment on what they have experienced during this time together. Choose a group member to read the following.

Reader: Patient and loving God,
 Your Son, Jesus, shows us the consolation your peace alone can give.
 We know we often fail to live in harmony with each other.
 May we practice the “art of accompaniment”,
 which “heals, liberates and encourages growth.”
 Give us the ability to listen with compassion,
 finding paths of understanding and tolerance in all our relationships.
 We pray through Christ, the Prince of Peace.

All: Amen.

TYPES OF LISTENING

Active listening:

- Eye contact and utilizes body language
- Listens to content not just words
- Is genuinely interested and focused on listener (Not looking at computer or phone)
- Restate what the person said
- Be aware of your own feelings in response

Reflective listening:

- Utilizes active listening skills
- Reflects the subject back to the speaker relaying content of the message using the speakers words
- Does not parrot or simply repeat, shows the ability to summarize and incorporate the idea
- Waits to share response

Empathetic listening:

- Builds on active and reflective listening
- Used to avoid assaultive behaviors in conflict or disagreement
- Work toward being non-judgmental
- Don't minimize or trivialize the speaker's issue or concerns
- Read the speaker's emotions and underlying tones, respond to the emotions as well as the content, but try not to escalate
- Ask clarifying questions not looking for blame or weaknesses in the conflict/disagreement
- Be quiet, make space for your response, don't just react

Unconditional listening:

- Continues to utilize and build on the skills listed above
- Listens with an open heart and curious mind
- Makes an unstated commitment to preserve the relationship over "being right"
- Is aware of power and power struggles in conversations and conflict
- Recognizes the interplay of stereotypes, bias and subjective language
- Engages in listening as a spiritual practice
- Understands our own limitations – feeling blamed, getting triggered, becoming defensive, feel the need to protect self or attack the other
- If verbally attacked committed to listening for speaker's core values, underlying emotions and responds to the concern or need being shared.
- Recognizes when it is time to end an abusive conversation, but works to find a respectful way to disengage and create opportunity for future dialogue
- Is comfortable in self and clear in own ideas and values