

ACC Listening Circle Template 2016

INTRODUCTION

“Listening means much more than hearing. Hearing concerns the scope of information. Listening, instead, refers to that of communication, to that particular propensity to closeness with others without which there cannot be a true encounter. Listening allows us to assume the right attitude and to find the words more suitable to leave the tranquil state of spectator.”

Pope Francis

“The quality of mercy is not strained. It drops as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed: It blesses him that gives and him that takes.

William Shakespeare-The Merchant of Venice.

What is a Listening Circle? Why are we inviting you to participate?

Listening and actually hearing another, acknowledges both the self and the speaker.

Building on our Listening Assemblies of 2010, our goal in this Year of Mercy, is to create a safe, confidential setting where deep listening happens. We live in a chaotic world where we listen less and less to one another. Technology has added to this deprivation. . There can be a blooming of hope and expectation as children of the Sacred.

GOALS

- * To create a space for Catholics to be open/honest about their concerns and feelings for our church and their role (active, inactive or departed) in it;
- * To understand with confidence where/how these concerns arise.
- * To recognize our rights and responsibilities to be active, vocal members of Church; acting as St. Francis, who was called to act, "to rebuild my Church".
- *To develop the process that can help us all, as American Catholics, to form our own Sense of the Faithful. (*Sensus Fidelium*)

*To act on research conducted jointly with Catholic Church Reform Int'l (CCRI) that showed a clear sense that the people want their Church to become more Christ-centered: welcoming, inviting and nurturing.

* To activate the Priesthood of the Laity to observe, assess and contribute to Church decisions through the lens of Love, Mercy and Courage

* To gather early in the Year of Mercy and look at our Church experience along with the life experiences of others on what Mercy may mean to us all

METHOD

1. We invite you to convene a committee that will meet locally, off Catholic Church property to discuss and explore Catholic experience. This discussion is confidential to allow for open and honest exchanges. If you decide to share your thoughts, the American Catholic Council (ACC) will receive your submissions and be guided by your advice to build support services for our collective growth together. The ACC can also provide you with support for meetings or record your conclusions. We could connect you with other groups like yours if you choose that direction.

2. Our plan is comprised of ten sessions. With each session lasting for about two hours. (Hour 1: **Welcoming**. Hour 2: **Discussion**) If you convene for additional sessions after this, we'd hope to continue tuning into to your Sense of the Faithful.

A. The Welcoming Process opens each circle and lasts for about 40 minutes:

* Introductions of neighbors, friends, family, goals.

* A circle of chairs is formed with an attractive blanket or cloth on the floor or table with a lit candle and welcoming music. *Note: The group may prefer to arrange themselves into pairs to begin with, then merge pairs into groups of four, etc. before having the entire group in the same circle. This pairing variant may make it easier for some people to speak.*

* Appointment by consensus of a recorder (who takes notes, proposes summary statements during Review time) and a leader, who keeps the group on track

* Opening Prayer

* Sharing of an object (artifact, photo, object ex. rosary, photo of confirmation, set of keys, poem, etc. placed into the circle and used to illustrate your point of view on a Catholic issue or experience.

* Those ideas are honored with about a moment of silence when each is completed

The Objective of the Welcoming Process is to begin to build Catholic Christian relationships as we have been invited to do, more on a heart-value level. Using a tangible object to help us introduce issues that are deeply meaningful to us for the attendees to better understand one another and break open the human experience of what it means to be Church. The silence is offered to help us see that while our experiences are different, we are one and holy in our desires to better understand one another and our relationship with Jesus' message.

B. The Discussion Process continues each circle and lasts for about 80 minutes. A pre-arranged reader presents a text* based on a suggested theme (see topics below) to ground the discussion in reflective thought and conversation.

* discuss meaning of this reading for each participant today, (This may include ideas presented about interests expressed earlier, but not to challenge them. It works well to say, "What I think or feel is...") *Note: The group may prefer to begin the discussion in pairs, in the variant described above.*

Objective of the Discussion Process: To bring Catholic Christian relationships to heart-level teachings of Jesus, Doctrine, theologians, one another. Using sacred, meaningful texts and resources to better understand one another as a People of God.

C. Conclusion

* Prayer For Others:

* Review of today's session: What went well? What can we do better? What is our sense of the Faithful here and now? Is there an action we feel called to

take? Ex.: Further research? Attend a talk? Interview a parishioner? A priest? Sharing a video? Conducting a survey? Is there someone we can help? Connect with other groups? Etc.

* Planning of Next Session

* Closing Prayer, your Choice

Discussion Suggestions	Possible Resources
Discussion 1 Theme: Catholic Community: Reading of Matthew 18	<i>Repair My House</i> , 2012, by Michael Crosby (Nihil Obstat Rev. Francis Dombrowski)
Discussion 2 Theme: Role of the Clergy, Reading of Matthew 16	
Discussion 3 Theme: Who are the Church?: Definition of Church as People of God	
Discussion 4 Theme: What is our Duty to the Pope? Mercy: Mirroring Francis' priorities	
Discussion 5 Theme: Reception of Church Teaching	
Discussion 6 Theme: Teaching on Primacy of Conscience	
Discussion 7 Theme: ACC Catholic Bill of Rights and Responsibilities	
Discussion 8 Theme: Assessment of our group: what have we learned from each other, what does it mean for us today, and does it matter?	
Discussion 9 Theme: Partnership with Clergy	
Discussion 10 Theme: Dogma, Doctrine and the Greatest Commandment	
Discussion 11 Theme: Gifts of Baptism	
Discussion 12 Theme: Gifts of Confirmation	

Discussion 13 Theme: Cultures Within the Church. Honoring both Hierarchy-seeking Culture and Equality- Seeking Culture	
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Historical Background

Origins of a Listening Circle By Cheryl Lyon, Peterborough Ontario

The approach to Catholic church “reform” in Peterborough can perhaps best be described in the words of the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh:

“through the practice of deep looking and deep listening, we become free, able to see the beauty and value of our own and others’ traditions”.

The Circle is the guiding symbol of The Listening Assembly. The Circle is as old as humanity, deep in our psyche from our earliest days of gathering around the fire and telling stories to define who we are and how we belong to one another and our Earth. In a circle, we are all equal and we face one another at the same level.

Each gathering is around the Centre. It can be thought of as the hub of a wheel or the fire at the centre of a gathering, a sort of tangible common ground, and the well wherein what we say is deposited and held safely. A leader can create a Centre simply with a coloured cloth on the floor. It can be a low table. Participants can be invited to create the Centre by bringing/placing an object that is meaningful to them related to the gathering’s purpose or help them visualize why they are there. Those present speak to/through the Centre that holds the energy of the group in a sort of neutral space so that it does not become personally directed. It helps us to truly listen to one another.

Our overall purpose is to listen to one another and in so doing we hear the Spirit. We listen deeply to one another, speak with intention and are each responsible for the well-being of the group.

A simple Ritual helps us to begin and to switch from ordinary space from which we are coming to sacred space. This may include a bell, a reading, gestures, music etc.

We have Agreements about how we talk together. Agreements can include such points as:

- * Confidentiality in the Circle
- * Listen with compassionate curiosity, withholding judgment

- * Pause from time to time to gather our thoughts and reflect/contemplate
- * One person at a time speaks

The Intention of the gathering is also articulated in advance. It is the reason why we are present, what we intend to happen by the end, and what we commit to doing or experiencing. Those who initiate the group formulate it. It starts it toward action. The Intention evolves with the group process and can become a new intention by the end of the gathering, according to what each participant has brought or expects or how the vision is changed in the course of the Circle discussion and process. It can be reworked according to personal and group needs. As a balancing act, it is evidence of openness and growth.

In Circle there is rotating leadership: trust that the resources to accomplish the Intention is to be found within the group. There is shared responsibility: everyone watches for what needs to be done or said next and makes what contribution they can. There is openness to surprises: not rigid sticking-to-the-almighty Agenda but attentiveness to the whole, what is happening now, where Spirit is taking us. There is no fear of silence in the Circle.

Storytelling is an important part of how we talk together. After all, our foundational scriptures – the Gospels – are a collection of stories. We speak honestly from our experience and feelings, not to score points or to debate but to really hear what is being said and what else is being said.

When decisions are called for, consensus is the norm (not voting). Not necessarily the same degree of enthusiasm is required but consent to move forward for the greater good. Consensus is also based on ensuring that every voice has been heard. No one is left out. Prayer can be a part of consensus making in Circle.

If the nature of the Circle requires a record (“minutes”), a “scribe” may volunteer. If there is contention, a “talking piece” may be used so that only one person speaks at a time. A “guardian” may be appointed to help the “host” or initiator of the Circle with time -keeping or for calling a moment of silence to honour something special that has been said or to reflect in tense moments.

Circle is part (and a basic feature) of a set of creative and democratic community-building practices. It can work well together with World Café and Open Space Technology. For instance, in Peterborough, we have left Circle at some points and used the rotating small group table discussions of World Café

to go more deeply into answering the American Catholic Council (ACC) Survey questions and discuss the Bill of Rights and Responsibilities.

The Peterborough Listening Assembly's participation in the ACC process and initiative was a catalyst for bringing reform-minded Catholics together locally. However, it became apparent that the group wants to move beyond this first Intention to something deeper than reform of the official Church to creating community, to re-experiencing the fire of the Spirit that animated the compassion and joy that were the attracting features of the first Christian communities. Circle process seems to be serving this new orientation well. We shall see what evolves!

From this sharing, may come immediate action suggestions, future direction.