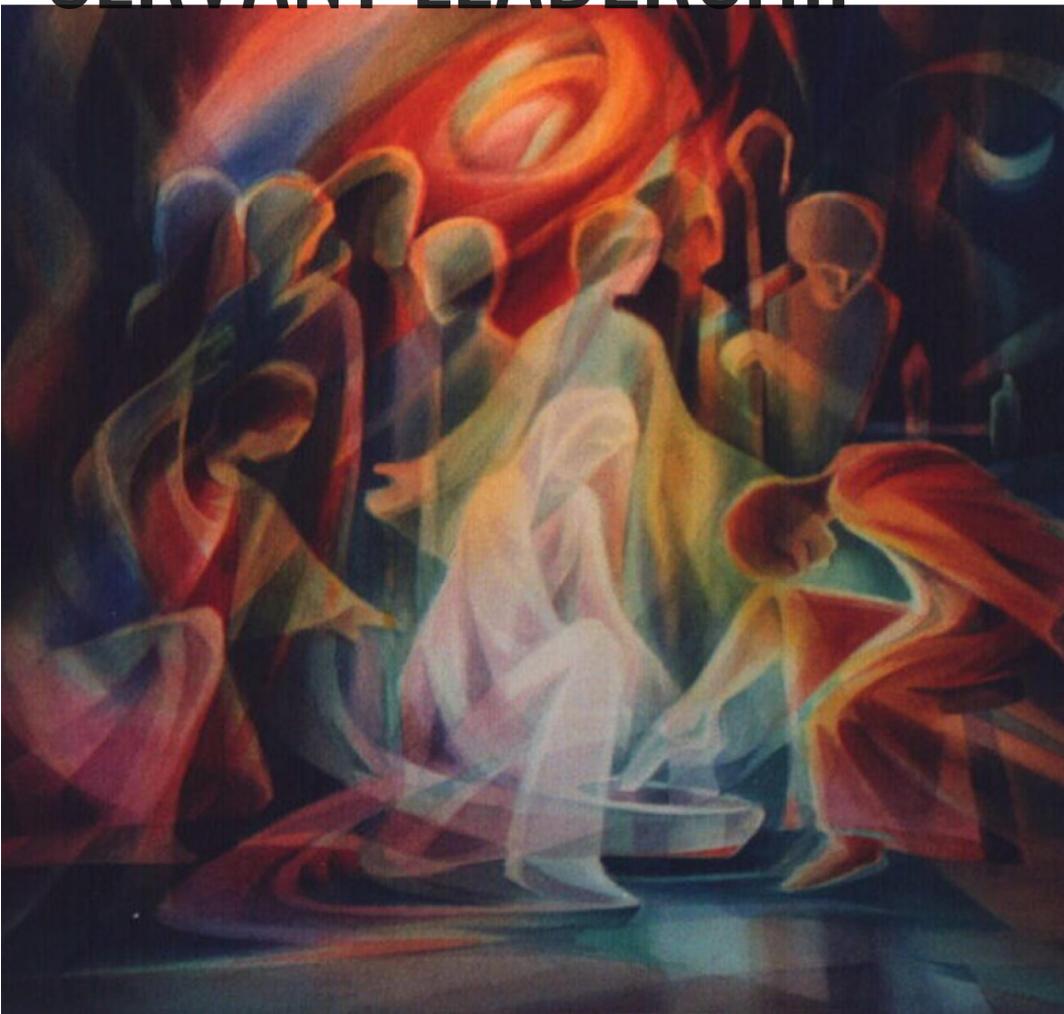


SCHOOL OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP



Learning to receive & respond to God's invitation to love & to serve like Jesus - becoming joyful missionary disciples.

LEARNING COMMUNITY GATHERING #4: Active Listening & Empathy

Pope Francis on Listening & Accompaniment

(from The Joy of the Gospels)

The “art of accompaniment” teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. *Ex* 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life ...

We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur.

Brené Brown on Empathy

(from Thought it Was Just Me)

Theresa Wiseman's describes four attributes of empathy as:

- To be able to see the world as others see it—This requires putting your own "stuff" aside to see the situation through your loved one's eyes.
- To be nonjudgmental—Judgement of another person's situation discounts the experience and is an attempt to protect ourselves from the pain of the situation.
- To understand another person's feelings—We have to be in touch with our own feelings in order to understand someone else's. Again, this requires putting your own "stuff" aside to focus on your loved one.
- To communicate your understanding of that person's feelings—Rather than saying, "At least you..." or "It could be worse..." try, "I've been there, and that really hurts," or (to quote an example from Brown) "It sounds like you are in a hard place now. Tell me more about it."

Empathy is a skill that strengthens with practice. The more we can both give and receive, the more we will can better accompany others.

ACTIVE / REFLECTIVE LISTENING

Reflective listening is a two-fold process that involves:

1. Truly hearing and understanding what the other person is saying through words and body language, and
2. Reflecting feelings and thoughts you heard through your own words, tone-of-voice, body posture and gesture so that the other person knows he or she is understood.

Reflective listening skills can be grouped into three clusters:

<u>Skill Cluster</u>	<u>Specific Skills</u>
1. Attending Skills	Contact, Posture, Gestures, Environment
2. Following Skills	Door-Openers, Acknowledgment Responses Active Silence, Open-ended Questions
3. Responding Skills	Paraphrasing, Reflecting Feelings, Reflecting Meanings, Summarizing

1. ATTENDING SKILLS

Attending is giving physical and psychological attention to another, as if he or she is the only person in the room. Effective attending conveys non-verbally that the listener is interested and is paying careful attention to the other - that the listener cares.

2. FOLLOWING SKILLS

(A) DOOR-OPENERS: A door-opener is a way to invite another person to freely consider saying something about what he or she is thinking or feeling.

Some examples of door-openers are:

1. Would you like to talk about it?
2. I'd be interested to hear how you feel.
3. Would it help to talk about it?
4. Is something bothering you?

(B) OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS: An open-ended question is one which allows another to answer in any way or in any depth he or she chooses. This kind of question does not invite "yes" or "no" or a short response. These questions can assist the other in

exploring aspects of himself or herself that were not initially available to the conscious. Some examples are:

1. What's on your mind, Joe?
2. What are you feeling about that? or How was that for you?
3. Can you say some more about ...?
4. Could you give me an example?

(C) ACTIVE SILENCE: Attentive silence is very important in giving another the space for deeper, often difficult feelings to be felt and brought to the surface. It also allows the listener to pray and process what is elicited within by the sharing of the other person. Talking too soon prevents a deeper exploration of thinking or feeling.

3. RESPONDING SKILLS

In responding, the listener reflects back to the other the essence of both the content and the feeling the other has communicated in a succinct way and in the listener's own words.

Paraphrasing: saying back to the speaker your own words what you heard the person say.

Reflective Feelings: reflecting accurately the emotional state of the person in your own words.

Reflecting Meanings: reflecting accurately both the content and the feeling of the other.

Summarizing: highlighting the main points of the other says in a concrete, brief, concise manner (CBC).

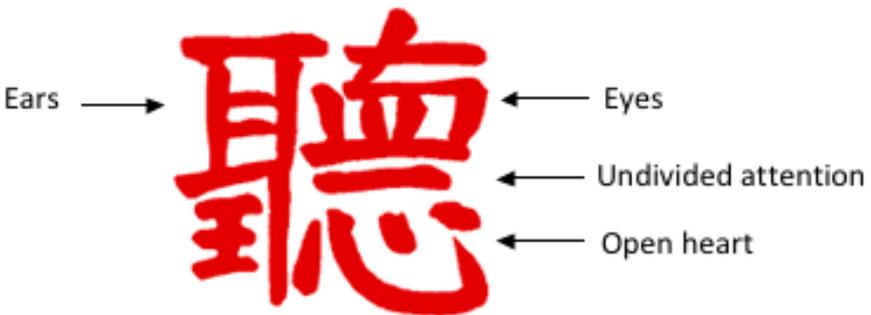
Responding skills are ways to check your perception of the speaker so that s/he feels connected with you. Some examples are:

1. I wonder if ...
2. It seems to me that you're saying ...
3. Is it possible that you might be feeling...

"Listening is being sensitive to the unshed tear."
"Listen & attend with the ear of your heart." - St Benedict

THE TOP TEN'S regarding ACTIVE LISTENING

	“DON’T”	“DO’S”
1	Talk too much.	Speak mainly to reflect feelings and meanings.
2	Be too distracted or fake listening.	Focus on the speaker, ask for repeat if needed.
3	Finish the sentence of the other.	Refrain from making conclusions prematurely.
4	Seek to fix things or offer judgments.	Strive to understand.
5	Remain too inert and entirely unresponsive.	Convey to the speaker that you are trying to listen, understand and care.
6	Focus on illustrative details & delivery.	Focus on the main story. Listen what is significant to the person.
7	Interrupt often, whether to gather facts or satisfy your curiosity.	Intervene mainly to ask open-ended questions.
8	Rehearse what to say while the speaker is talking.	Consider your response after the person finishes.
9	Be afraid of silence.	Allow silences. Pray during them.
10	Offer band-aid sympathy	Feel with people (being empathetic)



“To Listen”

Active Listening Praxis Handout (20 minutes)

1. Decide which partner will be the listener & which will be the sharer:

2. The sharer prays quietly the prayer:

For Honesty and Openness

I pray for the gift of openness, Lord,
I ask for the ability to share my feelings
with another in honesty,
And for the knowledge that no one is
making a judgment about my life,
even if this makes me uneasy.

And in all this I experience
the joy of knowing,
that in relationships
I am loved by you,
The God of love.

The listener prays quietly:

For Compassion

I pray for the gift of compassion, Lord,
I ask for the ability to enter into the
feelings of another with love,
And for the generosity to make no
judgment on another's life,
Even if this tries my patience.

And in all this I experience
the joy of knowing
that in compassion
I am like you,
The God of compassion.

3. The listener asks **one** of the questions below & listens for **7' minutes**:

- a. What concerns you most at this time?
- b. How is your relationship with God? What are present challenges and joys?

4. Both the listener and sharer give honest, concrete & brief feedback for **2-3 minutes**, using the following format:

- a. The listener reflects first, answering: How was I present? How was I empathetic ("feel with")? Which skill(s) could I be more attentive to?
- b. Then the sharer reflects: Did I feel that I was being understood? What was helpful about the listener's presence, behavior, or questions? What could have been more helpful?

5. Switch roles and repeat steps 2-3.

Reminders:

Be as present as possible and don't focus too much on applying the skills. Please return to the workshop room in 20 minutes.

PRAXIS

A. Reading & Noting

1. Read Henri Nouwen's *In the Name of Jesus* pages 71-101 (Chapter 3: "From Leading to Being Led" & the Epilogue). Note what consoles, challenges, or puzzles you while reading.
2. Journal about your response to the following questions:
In your experience, does it seem "easier to be God than to love God" or to lead rather than being led? What makes it difficult for you to love God or be led by God?

B. Practicing & Noting

1. Watch Brené Brown's "The Power of Vulnerability" at the bottom of this webpage: www.ChristusMinistries.org/lc4. Reflect on the prompting questions below the video.
2. Practice active listening to 3 people before the next meeting. Reflect on the following questions afterwards:
 - How was I empathetic ("feel with") or not?
 - Which active listening skill(s) could I better cultivate?
 - How did God and I "do it together," or not?
3. Journal before the next gathering using these prompts:
 - What did I learn about God, myself, and/or others through my praxis?
 - As I accompany others, do I find myself trusting God (following the Spirit) or relying on myself (making things happen) more? How so?

"We are called to witness a new way of living together in fidelity to the Gospel ... by clinging to the love of God ... and entering a revolution of tenderness."

– Pope Francis