

EXPLORATIONS



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Inside this Issue

A Gift to the Emerging Church
 The Rev. Bill Lupfer

A Culture of Spiritual Discernment
 The Rev. Dr. Laura Sheridan-Campbell

Weaving Intercessory
 Suzanne Farnham

A Gift to the Emerging Church

**The Rev. Bill Lupfer
 Portland, Oregon**

We transmit Christian wisdom and Gospel values to the next generation...or we die! Christianity is a young religion. We are eighty generations old; we've seen Christian wisdom passed to the next generation only eighty times. We are currently struggling to bring the next generation into the wisdom tradition that has given so much to our lives. The very existence of Christianity hangs in the balance. We can no longer assume that the next generation will come back to church when they have children. Young families are not coming back in sufficient numbers.

The "emerging church" movement is one current response in our collective efforts. From my perspective, Listening Hearts has been ahead of the emerging church curve and is uniquely positioned to help us meet the challenge of bringing in the next generation. In fact, Listening Hearts has been doing this in a variety of ways for a generation already. There are three distinct reasons Listening Hearts is in such a strong position today.

First folks today want transformational tools—spiritual technologies, if you will. Listening Hearts' online resources include a library of creative meditation exercises and the start of a series of easy-to-follow outlines for discernment in daily life. The appendices of the Listening Hearts books provide practical guidelines for engaging in discernment in various contexts. These combine to be powerful teaching resources for spiritual seekers and for church leaders.

Second, Listening Hearts links ancient wisdom with modern practice in a way that allows for change in modern practice even as the ancient values and wisdom stay constant. Anyone who has worked with Listening Hearts in a congregation knows how adaptable it is. At a time when many parts of our lives are in flux, Listening Hearts adapts classical wisdom to modern challenges.

Third, Listening Hearts provides excellent tools to link prayer and action. Before I was ordained, I attended one of the early Listening Hearts retreats on discernment process. My discernment focus centered on my desire to reconcile with my brother. I was amazed at how the prayerful listening in my group helped me gain the insight required to reach out to my brother. The reconciliation that followed was clearly linked to the work I did with my Listening Hearts friends. Given this experience, it's probably no accident that, when I was rector of my first parish, I turned to Listening Hearts and invited Suzanne Farnham to join our vestry on retreat. Suzanne's blend of quiet spiritual insight, humor, and fond acceptance of differences was just what that vestry required to go deeper into their maturity. We left the retreat with a confident spirit, willing to embrace those in our group who saw things differently. This retreat led the vestry into profoundly deeper meetings where genuine risks were taken.

Listening Hearts is more essential for the Christian leader than ever before. All Christian communities face the challenge of bringing in the next generation – we are all emerging churches in this task – and Listening Hearts gives us tools to welcome the next generation. What a joy it is to have this practical wisdom available at the grassroots level, which some might say is always the place of the emerging church!

The Rev. Bill Lupfer has been Dean of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, Oregon, for the past nine years. He loves to travel with his wife and two teenagers, especially to his wife's family home in Japan.

A Culture of Spiritual Discernment

**The Rev. Dr. Laura Sheridan-Campbell
Carlsbad, CA**

The Episcopal Diocese of San Diego has known the fruits of Listening Hearts seeds planted over a span of twenty years. Thanks to the expert leadership of Susan Ward, one of the authors of the original book, more than twenty Listening Hearts discerners have been trained throughout our geographically large and culturally diverse diocese. They have grown together as a community over time. For years, they have met in groups of two or three with any person from one of our churches who comes forward seeking discernment in a life or ministry issue.

Now, in light of recent canonical changes in the Episcopal Church's ordination process, Bishop Mathes and the Commission on Ministry (clergy and laity appointed to oversee the ordination process) are drawing upon the Listening Hearts model for vocational ministry discernment. They are developing what we are calling a "culture of spiritual discernment" consonant with the Church's mission. It started with putting Listening Hearts books into the hands of the Commission on Ministry and other leaders. Then we invited Listening Hearts to come to San Diego to train our discerners as at-large members of local parish discernment committees (PDC). Now those persons are training other PDC members and serving alongside them. The Diocese of San Diego is purchasing a lot of the 20th edition *Listening Hearts*!

During these months of revision to the ordination process, 18 nominees have discerned a call to diaconal ministry or priesthood. They represent a welcome diversity of age, background, gender, and cultural identity, and the Listening Hearts method plays a unifying role. Each PDC gathers with the nominee six to eight times. To undergird the process, a discernment retreat is being planned, a cycle of prayer for the ordination process is being distributed, and everyone who participates is being supported, not just the nominees. We pray that as this revised process unfolds, the stages will be seen less as “hoops” to be jumped through and more as opportunities for the Church in our corner of God’s vineyard to be leavened through mutual vocational discernment.

As a diocesan leader helping to shape this process, I’m learning that aspiring to a culture of spiritual discernment is one thing, but developing takes hard work, patience, prayer, and a willingness to let go of the old process in favor of one that presumes the Holy Spirit’s empowerment of each person sitting at the table. Too often, the Episcopal Church places responsibility for discernment for ordination in the hands of a very few and limits its scope to defined steps. In the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego, we are being reminded that spiritual discernment is an act of the whole Church that cannot be contained in categories called Nomination, Postulancy, Candidacy, and Ordination.

Throughout this season of change, much is being asked of all who participate. It is heartening to know that Listening Hearts is not only a discernment method but also a community of prayer that undergirds a vast network of discerners and points us all to the One who unites us in this holy work.

The Rev. Dr. Laura Sheridan-Campbell serves as Vicar of Holy Cross Episcopal Church in Carlsbad, CA, and as Commission on Ministry chairperson in the Diocese of San Diego.

Weaving Intercessory Prayer into Daily Activity

**Suzanne Farnham
Founder**

Approaching intercessory prayer contemplatively, I hold the person I am praying for, along with his or her specific circumstances, at the center of my being. At the same time I open myself to God’s compassion and truth, offering myself as a channel of God’s wholeness. If there were only one name on my prayer list, this would not be difficult. But I have a long list of people to pray for, and until recently I would space out and lose track of where I was on the list. It wasn’t working.

But I discovered that I can overcome this problem if I weave intercession into my daily activities. I have come up with two ways that work for me. The first is to integrate intercessory prayer into my exercise routine. The second is to use Post-it notes.

My exercise discipline is to swim slowly. I have started using this time to pray for my family and others who are central to my life. I begin by holding one of my children along with members of her household individually in prayer while I swim for a given distance. Then I reverse direction and in a like manner pray for my next child and his household for the same distance, then reverse direction for the next one.

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Listening Hearts Ministries provides a range of programs, publications, and services that teach people the practice of spiritual discernment through prayerful listening in supportive communities.

Those who await the Spirit as they confront their common concerns can hope to experience the love of God bonding them together in heart and mind.

—Grounded in God, p. 35

After that I pray for members of my extended family, including those who have departed this earthly life, each for a few strokes. Then I pray for a long list of people who are important to the work of Listening Hearts. Finally I pray for members of a discernment group I am part of. Although swimming is my exercise routine, the same principles could be applied to walking, running, using exercise equipment, or practicing yoga.

For persons with specific needs, I use Post-its, grouping the names to reflect similar circumstances. For example, I have four friends with chronic orthopedic problems. I write their names on one note and stick it somewhere in my home where I will see it often. Similarly, I put names of people with personal problems on another note, which I place in some other location that I pass frequently to remind me to hold them in my heart. Each time I notice a list, I briefly offer prayer for the people in that cluster. The number of lists and their composition change as situations come and go.

This weaving of intercession into my daily activities has strengthened my prayer life. The prayer enriches my activity and the activity invigorates my prayer. The contemplative nature of the endeavor bonds me at a deeper level with people, their needs, and God in a way that unifies all. This practice is no panacea and it will evolve with time. Certainly I never will be able to pray for everyone I care about—my intercessory prayer had dissipated and these innovations have brought it back to life. My relationships with both other people and God are infused with fresh energy.