Contemplation, Dialogue, and Discernment

Why Contemplation? … *Taking a long loving look at what is*

- Centers all that we are, and all we desire to be on the movement of God’s spirit
- Supports a “flexible shaping” and integration of prayer, reflection, dialogue in addressing any variety of topics, concerns, questions
- Enables any conversation to become a spiritual experience rather than being about mere “business” or problem-solving
- Engages our minds and hearts in movement toward a new consciousness – a new way of seeing, a new way of being
- Assists a group in moving from “I” to “We”
- Invites silence which supports slowing down, reflection, and deeper conversation
- Allows for creative possibilities, emerging options, and peaceful resolution

Contemplatio – templum

- A piece of ground consecrated for worship
- A place reserved or cut out
- A cleared space in front of the altar

*LIVE OUT of a “cleared space” in which God’s spirit dwells.*

Movements in the Contemplative Process

**Noticing what is... Observe**

- Without judgment
- Pay attention
- Take time and not rush to conclusions
- Slow down and wait

**Coming to Quiet... Reflect**

- Externally:
  - A still body
  - External Silence
• Internally:
  • Stilling the mind
  • Letting of thoughts and chatter
  • Quieting the heart
  • Letting go/letting come

Act
  • Offer what I/we see and hear freely
  • Come to a decision and/or course of action
  • Returning to quiet receptivity

Contemplative Dialogue
  Together we:
  • Build on insights
  • Encourage curiosity
  • Make connections
  • Seek patterns

Contemplative dialogue, deeply grounded in silence, allows us to experience a profound state of shared consciousness as we listen from the fullness of who we are, speak to one another with humility, candor, trust and vulnerability, and open ourselves to being transformed by what we hear.

Liz Sweeney, SSJ

Three Movements
  • Observe, observe, observe
    - What are you noticing in yourself, in others, in what is happening around you?
  • Reflect
    - What meaning/understanding/conclusions do you draw from what you are observing?
  • Act
    - What response will be made in light of observation and reflection?

Inner Dispositions
  • Open Mind - (commitment to truth)
    – see with fresh eyes
  • Open Heart - (commitment to love)
    – walk in the shoes of another
  • Open Will - (commitment to courage)
    – let go of fear, new will come
Three Voices
  • Voice of Judgment - stifles creativity
  • Voice of Cynicism - only my way of thinking, doing
  • Voice of Fear - cannot let go so new can come

Levels of Listening
  • Downloading: confirms what you already know
  • Factual Listening: you notice something new
  • Empathic listening: changes your perspective when you see through the eyes of another
  • Generative listening: you are changed as a person

Levels of Conversation
  • Downloading: talking nice, “same old”
  • Debate: talking tough, “my way” or no way
  • Dialogue: reflective inquiry, seeing myself as part of the whole
  • Deep Conversation: collective creativity, shifting from “I” to “we”

It is God’s transformative grace and practicing the discipline of communal discernment that moves us to a new, more generative place. Carole Shinnick, SSND

Behaviors that support Discernment
  • All have access to information needed
  • No one dominates and no one is silent
  • Pace the process which allows silence and sharing
  • Listen to one another, trusting the wisdom of the group
  • Have the meeting at the meeting

Behaviors Incompatible with Discernment
  • Sharing information inconsistently, or in a misleading way
  • Caucusing to push an agenda
  • Dominating, manipulating
  • Debating with each other
  • Shifting the energy from being collaborative to being adversarial

We need to evolve communally at the level of consciousness. It is an invitation to learn to transform the way we are together to evolve in our way of thinking, feeling, and loving when we are in relationship communally. Lis Sweeney, SSJ

Contemplation is the fundamental reality of life. It makes life real and alive. It makes us truly human. Contemplation goes beyond concept and apprehends God not as a separate object but as the Reality with our reality, the Being within our being, the life of our life. Thomas Merton

Adaptions and quotations from the work of
  Otto Scharmer, Peter Senge
  Marie McCarthy, SP
  Carole Shinnick, SSND
  Liz Sweeney, SSJ
  Catherine Bertrand, SSND