Listening in a Healing Way

As church communities experience an aging population, many are developing a lay pastoral ministry consisting of church members who volunteer to spend time visiting, befriending and assisting these older members. Many of those visited are isolated from church fellowship, and indeed may be very isolated from any fellowship at all and suffer from loneliness and spiritual distresses of illness or old age; they may also need assistance that the church community can provide or find resources to provide.

Pastoral Visitor Training Sessions have been designed by Jeanne Childs, a geriatric Chaplain with the Dartmouth Centers for Health and Aging, because it is felt that training can significantly enhance the visits and contribute to the well being of both the visitor and the person visited.

The first course involves developing the art of healing listening. It consists of three 1 hr. 15 min. thematic skill-building sessions involving role play, observation, self reflection, theory, practice, handouts, prayer and reading suggestions.

Session One: OBSERVING
This session centers around analyzing role plays which demonstrate unhelpful responses in an effort to build awareness of the everyday listening and non-listening habits common to many people. Participants will react to these role plays and notice what is helpful and what is not.

Take-home exercise:
- Listen closely to your daily conversations … your own responses to others .... and the way others listen to you.
- Try to figure out what is hindering and what is helpful in how others listen to YOU.
- Also notice how you come across to others: what makes them respond to you positively or negatively.
- Notice any other tendencies in your communication style which you consider effective or not so effective.
- Pray

Session Two: LEARNING (2-3 weeks later)
In this session, class notes and homework will be shared and discussed at length. Our objective will be to support one another in identifying what helps and what hinders helpful communication.

Take-home exercise:
- Practice.
- Read.
  -- The Art of Listening in a Healing Way ... by James Miller
  -- I Don’t Have to Make Everything All Better ... by Gary and Joy Lundberg
  -- Syllabus for this class.
- Keep notes of your visits to parishioners, recording conversations which you found difficult and questions you might have.
- Pray

Session Three: REFINING (a month or so later … and continuing as desired)
This session consists in sharing, problem solving, and refining listening skills using the real life experience brought to the group by its members.

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