

I WILL LISTEN

By: Sigrid Austin

Jesus said in Luke 8-18, "Pay attention to how you listen." This is our Lord's solution to the puzzle of resolving conflict and misunderstanding. Roadblocks exist within diversity that challenge every church.

The beautiful prayer of St. Francis encourages us.

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me bring your
Love.
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord
And where there's doubt, true faith in you.

Make me a channel of your peace
Where there's despair in life, let me bring
Hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there's sadness, ever joy.

Make me a channel of your peace
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
In giving to all men that we receive
And in dying that we're born to eternal
Life.

Oh, Master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul.

Hearing this, who among us would disagree? The problem is in how; concretely we do this when we are at odds on any of the issues that affect congregations, families, political parties and so on. If we seek to win, we may well lose and have negative consequences from a hostile atmosphere. If we manipulate, we may win, but destroy trust and respect. In Matthew 7:3 Jesus says: "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own?" And in the same chapter, twelfth verse, "In everything, do unto others as you would have them do unto you; for this is the law and the prophets." (Oxford Annotated Bible). This is a good place to start--not with the other but with oneself. We all do what we do because it makes sense to us. Our personal blind spots

come from unawareness of our most difficult feelings. We all have easier, cover feelings that in some way have grown as self protection. Thus, an angry person may be covering fear. A fearful person may be covering anger. A controlling, arrogant person may be covering shame. Unless we can turn our own log over, it is more difficult to be fully present in attempting conflict resolution. Jesus knows this and loves us each where we are emotionally. His help is a prayer away. How can we approach a conflict in our church then? Suppose our congregation has become crossways over the worship format with many of the younger members favoring Praise music and informal style. The older group prefers traditional hymns and format for worship. There is likely to be a fair amount of tension, anger, and pain at the start. Here is a way to come to resolution. Love, mercy, and grace in our attitudes would lead us to meeting each other where he perceives the other to be. If one in the group can thank the others for coming in a meeting called to cope with this issue, and identify the negative emotions that may be there, it helps to cool the negativity in the atmosphere. If each takes a turn and expresses his need and how the prospect of change feels to him, receiving that sharing as a gift sets a new stage. It is essential that the listener simply listen without interrupting. The listener can then reflect back to the sharer what he understood the sharer to have said, and how the sharer felt. The listener can express gratitude for the sharing, and then, take his turn sharing while the other listens. Reflecting back is needed so that clarification or correction can be done as needed. Now we have a team who can find multiple solutions to their dilemma. Trust, respect, and fellowship will usually develop. If one remains angry and unwilling, the other can reflect calmly what he perceives the angry one's emotion to be. Often, being received kindly will cool down the angry one. Then the calmer of the two can suggest that they each share as described above. The conversation might sound like this: "I see how angry this proposed change makes you. Let's see if we can work on that together. I don't want to leave you in such painful upset." This is how we concretely love each other with servants' hearts.

Sigrid Austin

Suppose our congregation is crossways over the manner of worship