



# Listening Across a Divide

Diocese of St. Petersburg

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# A starting agenda for this evening

What divides us?

We are designed for empathy and connection; what goes wrong?

Problems and their antidotes

Reflection & Dialogue

Discernment and Action

# What Divides Us?

- Racism
- Ethnocentrism
- Sexism
- Ageism
- Political Differences
- Religious Differences



# We were designed for empathy & connection

## **In our brains...**

- Our mirror neurons
- Emotional centers
- Thinking centers
- Memory

## **And in our body**

- The vagal nerve system
- Our endocrine system
- Our cardiovascular system

# So What Goes Wrong?

How does our natural drive to connect go wrong?

# Yeah, we're all oblivious sometimes

## **The Problem**

- Distraction: we don't see what's happening right in front of us.
- Ethnocentrism
- Resistance to others' pain
- Life is Math
- Defensiveness

## **The Antidote**

- Attention
- Respectful curiosity
- Acknowledging our own wounds
- Life is Love
- Yes, I hear you

# Listening to Self, Listening to Others

- You know what this feels like (it just looks different sometimes)
- Learning to listen: For information, for emotion, For meaning and significance
- Humility: I cannot know all about this experience or way
- Step out of zero-sum into love and acceptance of God's abundance
- Acknowledge systemic flaws, wrong actions, unfairness

Starting to understand, but...

Sensitivity without action may be nothing more than self-indulgence.

If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? (James 2:15-16)



# Reflection/Discussion

Questions for pondering/discussion.

When have you felt “less than” or experienced being treated as “less than” others and then had your experience and/or feelings discounted? How did this feel? How might reflecting on these episodes expand your heart to hear others’ stories?

How do we address old patterns when we are afraid of being blamed for the problem because of identification with a particular group? What helps gather the courage to address things directly, realizing it will be uncomfortable?

How do we decide where to draw the line with family and loved ones whose beliefs, attitudes and speech conflict with our values? How do we thoughtfully invite someone into a consideration of a different perspective?

# Do Not Give Silent Assent...

The off-hand remark, the “joke” at a social or work event

- Respond with quiet confidence

- Invite discussion; ask questions (not “why” questions)

- Set your boundaries

The discriminatory act:

- Defer your place

- Leave and explain why

- Report what you saw/heard

# Stirring up the waters

Systemic patterns of injustice require these actions: speaking, questioning, setting boundaries.

Addressing problems at a macro level involves risking more than annoying someone. It may cause a rupture in family relationships. It may lead to problems in employment and personal reputation.

# Discussion

Everyone present has their own rich experiences, perspectives, and insights.