

LISTENING HEARTS MINISTRIES

EXPLORATIONS

VOLUME 20 NUMBER 2

Spring 2010



Phone: 410-366-1851
Fax: 410-243-7062
listening@verizon.net
www.listeninghearts.org



Board of Trustees

Patricia Brown
Barbara Cates
Anne Clewell
Alice Dorrance
Suzanne Farnham
The Rev. Tim Grayson
DeAnn Gruber
R. Taylor McLean
The Rev. Bruce McPherson
Lee Owen
Maryellen Polvino-Bodnar
Frances Sullinger



Founder

Suzanne Farnham

Client Development & Evangelism

The Rev. Monique A. Ellison

Communications & Grants

Meagan Howell

Program Coordinator

Meg Kimble

Office Manager

Doris Walker



Inside this Issue

*Discernment through Prayerfully
Conceived Questions*

Suzanne Farnham

Discernment about the End of Life

The Rev. Mark Frazier

The Way to Listening Hearts

Meagan Howell

Discernment through Prayerfully Conceived Questions

Suzanne Farnham
Founder

Spiritual discernment is a quest. In Listening Hearts discernment, a group of three discerners journeys with the person seeking discernment, listening deeply to help that person articulate what he or she knows at some level but has not yet been able to see.

Questions that unlock inner truths are central to this communal endeavor. A distinctive feature of the Listening Hearts approach is that discerners limit themselves to posing questions. After the question has been clearly articulated, the basic information is in place, and the steps one might take in response have been named and weighed, the pace slows. The group becomes profoundly centered in God's presence. Discerners avoid multiple choice questions and any that require a "yes" or "no" answer. The objective is to help the person seeking discernment get beneath the surface to detect the light that illuminates the path forward. Questions that tap into the imagination tend to be the most effective.

By resisting the urge to make suggestions and dispense advice, discerners clear space for the seeker to uncover what he or she is searching for. This restraint maintains quiet space for the discerners as well, enhancing their own listening and awareness.

Discovering truth within oneself is far more powerful than being told. If you confront me with a hard truth about myself, my defenses will usually go up; but if I discover that same truth through my own insight, my resistance tends to remain dormant. Likewise, if you tell me something that I am ready to hear and that makes sense to me, it can be valuable to me; yet if I am gently prodded to make the discovery for myself, it makes a stronger, more lasting impact.

Sensitive questions allow reality to come into focus for us as we are able to accept it. Emily Dickinson said, "The truth must dazzle gradually or every man become blind." Jesus said, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." Our life in God brings forth a gradual sharpening of inner vision. Questions that are probing and prayerfully conceived open the way for spiritual growth to flourish. We can tolerate God's dazzling truth when we are nudged closer to it gently, one caring question at a time.

Discernment about the End of Life

**The Rev. Mark Frazier
Bristol, VA**

As a pastor and hospital chaplain, I have learned that one of the most important matters for prayerful discernment is advanced care planning. Our wishes on measures like life-support and resuscitation reflect our beliefs and provide much-needed guidance to those who may make decisions on our behalf should we become incapacitated. For Christians, our baptism is an ongoing experience of dying to our “old” selves—our selves born of the flesh. Considered through the lens of vocation, our calling as mortals is completed at the time of our death. The way we die is an important aspect of how we live out our baptism and our Christian vocation.

But talking about how we wish to die is not easy. Such discussions are usually emotionally charged, as they anticipate loss. Advanced care planning is an opportunity for discernment. Listening Hearts principles may serve as a helpful guide to prayerful end-of-life planning.

*The way we die is an important aspect of how we live out
our baptism and our Christian vocation.*

First, from a faith perspective, discussions about our wishes for how we die are holy conversations. God’s presence can be sought in ways that are similar to discerning God’s will on other questions. These conversations with the person we want to represent us can deepen relationships and reveal our convictions. Rather than just filling out a legal form or dictating directives to this person, we should begin this discernment openly, holding our convictions lightly and not assuming that we know what is “right.”

Second, although advanced care planning is a personal matter, these holy conversations can be held in Christian community. Often a mediator—a clergy person or other trusted person—is invited to facilitate conversation between the person doing the planning and the person’s representative. Other family members and friends may be invited. Discerning options prayerfully in community may provide needed insight and help us see how our decisions will affect others.

Third, approaching end-of-life issues with listening hearts may enable us to grow spiritually even as we contemplate the inevitability of death. The same signs of God’s call relied upon in other settings, the signs of the Holy Spirit at work, apply to these questions. Peace is a central sign—serenity and an enduring conviction that all things are made whole through the Resurrection of Christ. From this peace comes joy and clarity. Above all, openness, a willingness to live with the questions, and giving time for the process of discernment allow for spiritual well-being.

Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42) was a prayer of discernment in the face of death. Although his disciples left a lot to be desired as listeners, Jesus understood the importance of community as he approached the end of his earthly life. The realization that the vocation of our death is very much connected to the vocation of the rest of our life may lighten the darkness of the reality of death and bring us greater peace and wholeness.

The Rev. Mark Frazier is rector of Emmanuel Church in Bristol, VA. Mark and his wife Amy are the parents of four beautiful daughters and one handsome Chocolate Labrador Retriever.

LISTENING HEARTS MINISTRIES

CONTRIBUTORS



*Thank you to the many friends who share in the work of
Listening Hearts Ministries through their financial support.*

2009 CONTRIBUTORS

Robert & Eleanor Abarno, Johnstown, PA
The Rt. Rev. Gladstone B. Adams III
Syracuse, NY

R.L. & June Austin, Chesapeake, VA

Jessica Barnes, Pauline, SC

Joseph A. Barnes, Jr., Santa Barbara, CA

The Rev. Patti Barrett, Falmouth, MA

Bruce & Polly Behrens, Ruxton, MD

The Rev. Cynthia Bell, Fairhaven, MA

Edward & Ellen Bernard, Baltimore, MD

The Rev. David R. Boone, Hendersonville,
NC

The Rt. Rev. Fred Borsch, Los Angeles, CA

Judith A. Bowers, Vienna, VA

The Rev. Lyn G. Brakeman, Gloucester, MA

Erv & Tish Brown, Baltimore, MD

J. Michael Brown, Colerain, NC

Patricia M.C. Brown & Joseph P. Gill,
Severna Park, MD

Mary Gwen Brummitt, Coronado, CA

Galen & Birch Burghardt, Evanston, IL

Sally Campbell, Cold Spring Harbor, NY

Barbara Cates & Matthew Stremba,
Baltimore, MD

Becky Clark, Baltimore, MD

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Condon, Myersville, MD

David & Joanne Corey, Brattleboro, VT

Robert M. Coulbourn III, Towson, MD

Emily N. Cox, Baltimore, MD

Shelia L. Creswell, Vienna, VA

Jeanette R. Cureton, Chattanooga, TN

Fred Demers & Barbara Swain, Baltimore,
MD

Joan M. Diver, Portland, OR

Alice Cross Dorrance, Spartanburg, SC

Beulah Downing, Bainbridge Island, WA

Jean Dunbar, Spartanburg, SC

Ted & Sarah Eastman, Falls Church, VA

Mr. & Mrs. Carl Edwards, Chapel Hill, NC

James & Wendy Emrich, Swarthmore, PA

Judith Esmay, Hanover, NH

Austin & Reneé Farnham, Severna Park,
MD

Mrs. John H. Farnham, DeWitt, NY

Suzanne Farnham, Baltimore, MD

Eulalie & Jim Fenhagen, Pawleys Island,
SC

Anna S. Ferguson, Prineville, OR

Eileen Flanagan, Philadelphia, PA

The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Frazier, Bristol, VA

Adele B. Free, Baltimore, MD

Jim & Anita Gabler, Palm Beach, FL

Eloise Gift, Albuquerque, NM

Diane Gipson, Boston, MA

Nellie & Robert Gipson, Unadilla, NY

Pat & Tom Gipson, Raleigh, NC
The Rev. Timothy H. Grayson, Timonium,
MD
Dr. Charlene B. Griffin, Baltimore, MD
Anita L. Gruber, Madison, WI
DeAnn Gruber, Mandeville, LA
Mardi Hack, Raleigh, NC
J. Alex Haller, Jr., Glencoe, MD
The Rev. Albert Halverstadt & Susan
Weeks, Denver, CO
Betsy Heilman, Reston, VA
Shay & Ray Herman, Baltimore, MD
The Rev. & Mrs. William H. Hethcock,
Sewanee, TN
Eric S. Hoekstra, Greensboro, NC
Richard S. Holmes, Baltimore, MD
Cynthia A. Hoover, Bethesda, MD
Mary P. Hopson, Rangeley, ME
Alice C. Immler, Sykesville, MD
Irene V. Jackson-Brown, Washington, DC
Gregory Jones, Baltimore, MD
John & Lauranne Keester, Claremont, CA
Terrence Kelly, San Diego, CA
The Rev. Allan Knight, Chester, NH
Greg & Susan Lewis, Chevy Chase, MD
Gus & Mary Ann Lewis, Baltimore, MD
Al & Katharine Lowe, Schenectady, NY
Margie Mack, Riva, MD
Therese A. Maloney, Quincy, MA
Joyce E. Marks, San Bernardino, CA
Rich McAllister, Bainbridge Island, WA
Bernice M. McDaniels, Baltimore, MD
R. Taylor McLean, Baltimore, MD
Bruce McPherson, Annapolis, MD
The Rt. Rev. Rodney R. Michel,
Philadelphia, PA
Louise E. Miller, Baltimore, MD
The Rev. Charles J. Minifie, Hilton Head
Island, SC
Carolyn H. Morse, San Diego, CA
Helen P. Netos, Jamaica Plain, MA
Sherry Niermann, Centennial, CO
Maureen O'Ferrall, Baltimore, MD
Frederick Osborne III, Garrison, NY
Lee & Jenny Owen, Gibson Island, MD

James A. Owings, Baltimore, MD
Darrel Parke, Vienna, VA
Pete & Joan Partridge, Baltimore, MD
Paul & Susan Patton, Vienna, VA
Bonnie L. Paul, Harrisonburg, VA
John R. Potts, Oklahoma City, OK
Craig J. Price, Spartanburg, SC
The Rt. Rev. John L. Rabb, Baltimore, MD
Walter D. Ramberg, Sparks, MD
Joyce Ramelmeier, Ellicott City, MD
Mary Hope Rhodes, Spartanburg, SC
Marjorie B. Richmond, Upperco, MD
Dr. Jane Root, Indianapolis, IN
Janice Roshong, Acworth, GA
Barry Rabe & Dana Runestad, Plymouth,
MI
Fred Ruof, Baltimore, MD
Sarah E. Saxe, Arnold, MD
Miguel & Olga Schön, Baltimore, MD
John M. Seeley, Baltimore, MD
Mr. & Mrs. Truman T. Semans,
Brooklandville, MD
Butler & Yvonne Sharpe, Riverwoods, IL
The Shivers Family, Baltimore, MD
The Rev. Canon & Mrs. David I. Shoulders,
Indianapolis, IN
Judith L. Singer, Glen Mills, PA
Susan O. Smeragliuolo, Gibson Island, MD
The Rt. Rev. Andrew D. Smith, Hartford, CT
Betsey Spragins, Cockeysville, MD
Claire M. Stahler, Queensbury, NY
Laurel G. Stewart, Longmeadow, MA
Peggy Taliaferro, Cockeysville, MD
Janet & Lee Taylor, Baltimore, MD
John & Ashby Thompson, Baltimore, MD
Louise S. Thompson, Philadelphia, PA
Juli Towell, Short Hills, NJ
Larry & Sally Tully, Syracuse, NY
David Vaughn, Northville, MI
Nelvin Vos, Maxatawny, PA
Barbara Vosburgh, Cockeysville, MD
Marc Wall, Washington, DC
Ellen & David Wallack, Baltimore, MD
Liz Ward, Alexandria, VA
George P. Ward, Jr., Annapolis, MD

Susan & Sam Ward, Coronado, CA
Bill & Judy Waxter, Cockeyville, MD
Dick & Tish Weise, Catonsville, MD
The Rev. Jennifer & Mr. Benjamin
West, Westerville, OH
Barbara Coleman White, Baltimore, MD

Stephen & Patricia Wilcoxson, Phoenix,
MD
Ellen B. Williams, Cockeyville, MD
Eleanor Winsor, Scottsville, VA
Julie & Jake Young, Coronado, CA
Sue Zoole, Spartanburg, SC

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTRIBUTORS

Church of the Holy Comforter, Vienna, VA
Diocese of Central New York, Syracuse, NY
Diocese of Connecticut, Hartford, CT
Diocese of Maryland, Baltimore, MD
Episcopal Church Women, Church of the
Holy Comforter, Vienna, VA

The Gipson Family Foundation, Raleigh,
NC
Society of the Transfiguration, Cincinnati,
OH
Tianaderrah Foundation, Unadilla, NY

GIFTS TO HONOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Charles & Jo-An Howe, Coronado, CA
Susan Page Tillett, Lake Bluff, IL

The Rev. Jennifer & Mr. Benjamin West,
Westerville, OH

MEMORIALS

Joanne & David Corey, Brattleboro, VT

Donna Rewalt & Jeff Pitts, Durham, NC

LISTENING HEARTS MINISTRIES

Volunteers



*We are grateful for the people who volunteer their services
and for those who make in-kind contributions.*

Margaret Bain

Cynthia Bell

Patricia Brown

Anne Clewell

Wayne Dornbirer

Alice Dorrance

Austin Farnham

Brent Farnham

Kendall Farnham

Peggy Farnham

Reneé Farnham

Suzanne Farnham

Whitney Farnham

Pam Fleming

The Rev. Dr. Mark Frazier

Joe Gill

The Rev. Tim Grayson

DeAnn Gruber

Ken Kimble

Ned Kimble

Steve Kirchner

Gus & Mary Ann Lewis

The Rev. David Malone

John McIntyre

Taylor McLean

The Rev. Bruce McPherson

Carolyn Miller

Louise E. Miller

The Rev. Charles Minifie

Lee Owen

Maryellen Polvino-Bodner

Joyce Ramelmeier

Alice Ann Robertson

Wendy Schön

Frances Sullinger

Sam Ward

Susan Ward

Anne Whitmore

Marilyn Cornejo Wiseman

The Way to Listening Hearts

Meagan Howell
Annapolis, MD

On a gray January morning I drove down a narrow, serpentine street lined with row houses, wondering if I could possibly be heading in the right direction. Sure enough, the street emptied near the Listening Hearts parking area, and I was soon striding into the office, where four trustees were gathered.

We began with silence. I was surprised by how comfortable I felt in body and mind, occupying the stillness with strangers. Having just read *Listening Hearts*, I was somewhat prepared for this unusual job interview. Our talk that day was characterized by direct yet gentle exchanges. What did Listening Hearts need; what did I need? I had been staying home with my young children for nearly two years and was eager to work again. But was I ready to commute three days a week? And was I able to do what was required for the position?

The way forward from our first conversation was not unlike the curving road that leads to the Listening Hearts office. What lay around the next bend was hidden from view. I returned to my copy of *Listening Hearts* for guidance, spoke with my husband and other trusted friends, and sought quiet reflection where I could find it.

In the evening after my first interview, I set aside the practical issues that were beginning to clutter my heart: childcare, transportation, schedules—these preoccupations could all be resolved. The central question was whether or not working at Listening Hearts was the right thing to do. And so I asked God to help me quiet the intrusive thoughts. I needed to listen closely, with the ear of my heart.

I am not a practiced pray-er. I do not excel at sitting still. I'm a multitasker who has trouble saying no, someone who likes the *idea* of silence. I long for God—I do—just as soon as I finish putting away the breakfast dishes and answering those emails. How startling it was, as I sat on the floor of my cluttered bedroom, to find myself very quiet and still, feeling God's nearness and a growing sense of rightness about the work ahead.

By bringing the sacred into a time of transition, I came to understand how life's turning points are opportunities for deepening insight, reached through prayerful discernment.

Suddenly, in the midst of this peaceful confidence, I felt a strong, physical sensation breaking through the silence. It was almost like being kicked in the guts. I gasped, then heard myself utter my youngest child's name. Hot tears slid down my cheeks. In that moment I knew with utter clarity that I could not work 35 miles away from him three days a week.

What does a person do with that? God was helping me to see two opposing things: the rightness of the job, the wrongness of the job. I went into the second interview holding both truths in my heart, unsure of which way I would go. I was honest about my unwillingness to work in the way they needed me to. I shared some ideas about the ministry and expressed how meaningful my own discernment process had been thus far. As I left that day, I feared it was for the last time.

LISTENING HEARTS MINISTRIES
MEMORIAL EPISCOPAL CHURCH
1407 BOLTON STREET
BALTIMORE, MD 21217-4202

Non-Profit Org.
U S Postage
PAID
Baltimore, MD
Permit no. 2961

MISSION STATEMENT

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.

We are to become fully the people God created us to be, living our own lives in response to our own calls ... So it is that hearing one's call is akin to discovering one's self.

—Listening Hearts, p.11-12

The Way to Listening Hearts

A week later a trustee called. The group had changed the job description, hopefully to better suit my skills and family needs. The new job would allow me to usefully apply my gifts and experience to the mission, often working flexibly from home. I had anticipated compromise, yet in the end none was necessary. I could never have seen it coming.

Sitting with not-knowing is never easy, but it is a discomfort that can lead to wisdom and discovery. The weeks I spent on the path that led to joining the staff of Listening Hearts were characterized by openness and reflection, porousness and faith. Had the outcome been different, my gratitude for that journey would be the same. By bringing the sacred into a time of transition, I came to understand how life's turning points are opportunities for deepening insight, reached through prayerful discernment.

Meagan Howell is Associate for Communications and Grants for Listening Hearts Ministries. She coordinated this issue of Explorations for Alice Dorrance, who is on a short sabbatical.