

Bonds of Difference: Listening for Gifts of Others

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Keywords: Spiritual practice, Engaging the Other, Crossing divides

Ecumenical and interreligious dialogues have traditionally focused on searching for “how we are alike”, attempting to find enough common doctrinal ground for a full communion agreement, or in the case of interreligious dialogue to say that “we all want the same things, or “the same God loves and creates us all”. While this may be true, such dialogue often becomes more a projection of ourselves rather than truly knowing, engaging and appreciating the gifts of the other.

This presentation will focus on the “gifts of difference”. What kind of deep listening is required so that we discover what is in fact NOT like us, which can enrich and inform, and as much as anything, help us to know and name our own religious beliefs and practice. Here is where true partnership and mutual learning happen.

The presentation will look at ways this deep listening might be used not only in ecumenical and interreligious conversation, but also in our engagement in the public square, addressing issues of racial and social justice, naming and crossing divides of difference and disagreement. We will examine practical applications of moving away from sameness while working together for a common future, using local expressions of mission and ministry and analysis of those experiences. In these divided times, how do we build bridges, recognizing and appreciating difference? Possible examples are: Jewish Christian dialogue (in the US) on issues of Palestine and Israel, Independent Catholic conversations related to full communion; local Church plants which multiple denominations.

Resources include denominational interreligious statements, work of scholars such as Simran Jeet Singh on diversity, unity and difference, and the case studies and experiences of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) described in their book “*Engaging Others Knowing Ourselves*”.