

SESSION 3: Hermeneutics and Theological Reflection

Session: Introduces issues in hermeneutics within and across Traditions. Introduces the use of the Theological Reflection Circle in a group setting.

OUTLINE OF SCHEDULE:

05 min: Gathering Prayer

10 min: Homework Processing

25 min: Presentation and Discussion: Why Do We Care about Hermeneutics?

10 min: Presentation: The Hermeneutics of Faith and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion

05 min: Exercise: Queenie's Case

30 min: Using the Theological Reflection Circle in a Group

05 min: Assignment and Closing Prayer

COPIES THAT NEED TO BE MADE:

1 copy per participant:

Gathering/Closing Prayer (1 pg)

Hermeneutics Is (½ pg)

The Hermeneutics Of Faith And The Hermeneutics Of Suspicion (2 pgs or duplex)

Principles for Ambassadors (1 pg)

Queenie's Case (½ pg)

Theological Reflection Circle for Groups (1 pg)

Circles of Meaning-Making and Movements for Groups (2 pgs or duplex)

The Setback Revisited (1 pg)

Homework (1 pg)

INSTRUCTOR'S CONTENT

05 min: Gathering Prayer

The handout has both Gathering and Closing Prayer on it. Both prayers include some quiet and some personal sharing.

10 min: Homework Processing

Invite a couple participants to share: What they learned online? How did they share it? How did they analyze the conversation in which they shared it?

25 min: Presentation and Discussion: Why Do We Care about Hermeneutics?

(10 min) We have been easing into Theological Reflection in a group. As we do this in Interfaith Dialog, we obviously aren't working within a single Tradition! Last week we each played a part in a group conversation. Each part had a specific religious view. After we played it out, we analyzed what happened when those parts worked together in that role-play. As you did your homework, you analyzed another conversation.

Today we are going to beginning using the Theological Reflection Circle in a group setting. Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Ruthellen Josselson offers this equation for us to begin to approach this new situation: Life Story= Interpretation + Construction. Each of us will bring a life story to the Circle process and we will make sense of them together through interpretation and through construction. Our focus today will be more on interpretation.

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation of narratives: texts, verbal, and non-verbal communications. It is especially applied to religious and philosophical texts. We have asserted throughout this course that the core of any theology is narrative whether or not we're considering a Sacred Text. So because our lives are told as stories and our community's lives are told as stories, we use Hermeneutics on our own stories and as well as on our Tradition's stories.

Hermeneutics includes the meanings and relationships of words and the relationship of a part to the whole of a message—much as we analyzed last week. It is not possible for us to know all the principles of interpretation used in every Tradition that we encounter. Also, because Hermeneutics are couched in a Tradition's history and social context, they do shift and develop over time.

For example, the Jewish Babylonian Talmud is a collection of teachings that interpret the Tanak. This collection came from a couple of major schools, numerous specific teachers, and diverse places. In over 6200 pages of material, the Jewish community finally captures in writing what had lived for hundreds of years as an oral tradition of questioning and debating. Within the Talmud are several sets of specific rules for interpreting Scripture. The three most famous are the 7 Rules of Hillel, the 13 Rules of Rabbi Ishmael, and the 32 Rules of Rabbi Eliezer ben Jose HaGelili. But some collections set the number as high as 613—the same as the number of laws in the Torah. Whatever the number, these principles continue to be applied in a culture of scholarly debate.

In another example, after the Protestant Reformation, schools of "higher criticism" developed in the Christian world. New tools of investigation and evaluation were applied to Scripture. Because of advances in archeology, history, linguistics, and sociology these schools have evolved into highly specialized institutions. This has influenced all Christian Traditions—Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, independent. Even those that take as their first hermeneutical principle that Scripture is the inerrant Word of God use the benefits of these tools to be more faithful to the Living Word.

In another case, from its beginning, the Muslim community has carefully documented the transmission of all texts—Qur'anic (revealed Scripture,) Hadith (collections of sayings and teachings,) Tafsir (exegetical commentaries,) and Fiqh (books of jurisprudence.) The process of interpretation flows from the sources

closest to Qur'an and Mohammed out to living communities. Beyond agreeing that the Qur'an is the revelation of God, these Muslim communities also trace their principles of interpretation back to their founding scholars, most of who taught and wrote in the first couple of centuries of Islam. The Tradition of their community is in dialogue both with today's issues and with the Tradition as a whole.

You have encountered Hermeneutical principles in studying the worldviews and mental models of Traditions. Our concern is for you to be conscious that diverse principles are in use, that they may be very different across Traditions, and they may influence our work in groups even more than our one-on-one conversations because they will probably be more embedded than obvious as we sit down together. Once again, it will be up to you to know how to ask some basic questions to bring embedded principles to the surface to use them deliberately.

One other factor will deeply influence how the Hermeneutics of a Tradition is in play in a conversation: In what way are these people intimately connected to their Traditions? I am not asking whether they have a formal or important role in their Tradition, but whether they feel the kind of loyalty that puts them on the defensive or whether their role demands that they uphold a specific standard in your work. It is important to remember that when people represent a tradition in a conversation, there are times they can't act on their own impulses. But there are also times that we confuse our loyalty to our Tradition with an official position and it's important to tease this out gently.

Distribute the handout, Hermeneutics Is, and have participants begin work in pairs.

(5 min) Work in pairs on these questions:

- What is a Sacred Text or Sacred Story for you?
- What is the most important principle of interpretation—to you—for understanding that Story?
- What is the root of that principle? Who taught it to you? What does it help you do in your study?
- How has that principle helped or hindered you when talking with someone from a different Tradition?

(2 min) *With the whole group:* Have some participants share their most important principle of interpretation. Take note of similarities and differences in the principles and the way they're expressed then send them back to work in sets of four.

(5 min) *Work in groups of four (two pairs) with these questions:*

Tell the group your *partner's* first principle of interpretation.

- What similarities/differences do you hear in these descriptions?
- Is the difference you hear substantive? Are any of the principles directly opposed to each other?
- How would you function in a dialogue group that had opposing first principles? To what degree would you feel obliged to uphold yours? Would that be driven by emotion, your personal identity, your role in your community, or something else?

(3 min) *With the whole group:* Have some participants share someone else's answer to the last questions about upholding their first principle of interpretation. Ask those that offer the answer, "How comfortable are you with your fellow group member's answer? Does it feel familiar to your experience?"

Continue your presentation and make any connections you can as you proceed.

10 min: Presentation: The Hermeneutics of Faith and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion

Dr. Ruthellen Josselson is especially interested in how people talk about their lives. So she is a scholar in Narrative Research. I'm going to give you a handout (*The Hermeneutics Of Faith And The Hermeneutics Of Suspicion*) that summarizes an article she wrote about Hermeneutics using categories pioneered by the philosopher Paul Ricoeur. She has a very nuanced understanding of his two approaches to Hermeneutics. While we are not going to delve deeply into her work, this outline gives you an idea of how a professional thinks about the issues with which we are beginning to deal.

There are three points inspired by her work that I want you to hold onto:

- A) The two approaches are the Hermeneutics of Faith and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion. It is important to note that these are interviewing or reporting stances not character descriptions! It's not that some people are faithful and some are suspicious but our involvement with the Storyteller can take two primary paths. *Josselson's* point is that professionals tend to adopt one stance or the other and follow it through their work. If they have to shift to the other stance, they have to declare it in their reporting. Many folks have tried to suggest ways that the stances can be combined, but they really can't. If you are using one, the other is in the background. *In your work with groups*, you will probably need to use both stances and you need to be clear in your head when you're shifting—even if you don't say it out loud or report it as a professional interviewer might.
- B) *The Hermeneutics of Faith* aims to restore a text in a life history or a Tradition. It treats a Storyteller as a truth-teller. The stance of the reporter is one of empathetic listening. The Listener tries to stay faithful to the symbols of communication and attempts to fully appreciate both the perspective and message of the Storyteller. Effectively you try to do as little interpretation as possible. If you refer back to when we learned active listening techniques, in this stance you are Reflecting Back, Restating, and Empathizing.

The Hermeneutics of Suspicion aims to demystify a text or approach a Storyteller as a truth-holder who is not yet fully aware of his/her truth. The stance of the reporter is one of probing for discovery. You suspect that the core of the story is concealed or masked and must be uncovered and that symbols must be "decoded." Because you are operating in a group, this decoding helps others in different Traditions to understand a point more clearly. You may expect to do significant interpretation but you try to make the scales you use obvious so everyone stays engaged. In this stance you are Clarifying using both Open-Ended and Direct Questions. Particularly in a group, you may also be Summarizing one member's contribution to help keep the conversation going.

- C) As we use the Theological Reflection Circle with a group, you will notice immediately that the smaller circles (on the diagram) representing each participant have at least half of their orb outside the scope of this conversation. Even in our non-professional setting, we need to have principles for interpretation and articulate those principles so that our conversations remain productive. It is important that we be able to say what one of our first principles is: We will only work with what someone has brought to the table verbally not what remains implicit or hidden. This may be hard for some people because they will make assumptions about what others know or understand about them. But in the long run, it helps us be clearer about both our possibilities and our limits. Also in this way, we lean towards a Hermeneutic of Faith because we will seek clarifications about what we've heard and obvious gaps in it, but we aren't endlessly chasing down all the unspoken possibilities outside the conversation.

A general but wise premise of interfaith work is: Do not compare your tradition's best insights or practices with their worst insights or practices. It takes practice to strike a balance in these two hermeneutical stances. Healthy empathy is like good journalism—it asks strong questions but respects the speaker's limitations. If we let it go too far, we accept half-answers and half-truths and remain an inch deep in our conversation. Healthy suspicion is like healthy skepticism: It points to important new insights about other Traditions—but if we let it go too far, we fall into cynicism and noxious spirituality.

Three other cautions in considering principles of interpretation in our Interfaith Dialogue settings:

- 1) In our personal woundedness we sometimes confuse the message of a Tradition with some of its practitioners—we become suspicious of the wrong thing. We may become critical of an institution and take it out on folks who find it valuable and viable. Or we may prematurely shut down our openness to scriptures or teachers rather than deepen our study or examine the breadth of the Tradition.

- 2) By accepting all scriptures as inspired within their Tradition, we do not negate the honor and preeminence we give our own. In respecting others and upholding our own Tradition, we need to remember to practice the virtues of Humility and Hospitality. In *Humility* we say: I recognize *my* fallibility and imperfection in handling my own Tradition and *our* inability to hold the fullness of Revelation. In *Hospitality* we say: I am open to discovering distinctive Truth in your Tradition and growing in my Tradition because of it.
- 3) Whatever scripture we accept—Qur'an or Kerouac—we need to be both invested in it and serious about its application. We need to be consciously *living within* our own Sacred Stories not just talking *about* them if we want to contribute to and gain from Interfaith Dialogue. If we aren't invested, Hermeneutics is merely an academic exercise.

05 min: Exercise: Queenie's Case

Distribute the handout, Queenie's Case. Back in groups of 4, have participants read Queenie's Case and very briefly discuss these questions:

- What do you imagine Queenie did to frame her questions and experience to allow her to move and still be faithful to her Tradition?
- What can Queenie's Hermeneutic teach us about upholding our Tradition and still being able to move in dialogue?

30 min: Using the Theological Reflection Circle in a Group

(10 min) After several courses, the Theological Reflection Circle has surely become very familiar! Today we begin to use it in a group conversation. (Distribute the handouts, *Theological Reflection Circle with a Group* and *Circles of Meaning-Making*) Let's begin by looking at the most obvious differences:

- Theological reflection is not as straightforward because more than one Tradition is involved. The tasks remain the same: 1) Bringing embedded theology to the surface; 2) getting to meaning together. And the categories remain the same: Humanity, Divinity/Ultimacy, Essential Spiritual Concepts, Mental Models, and Role of the Community. But in order to make the process accessible for all group members, you may have to be vigilant in naming which categories are in play in the conversation and making sure all group members are really part of the conversation.
- Hermeneutics will also play a significant role in your conversation in two ways:
 - 1) You will ask people to be clear about what principles they are using to interpret their Traditions for this effort.
 - 2) You will be paying more attention than ever to the way words are put together—and trying to help people be clear with their meaning.
- Your role as Ambassador is sometimes as a facilitator and sometimes a representative. However, as with all elements of this training, these skills do not qualify you as a professional facilitator.
- Whether acting as nonprofessional facilitator or representative, it will be important to emphasize the use of "I" messages in the process.
 - If you are working in your own setting, you can function as a facilitator and guide the process. You will be responsible for articulating expectations at each transition and for helping others stay on task. Occasionally you may have to leave your own views and input out of the picture.
 - If the issue is important to you and you are the only representative of your Tradition, be sure to distinguish your view from your facilitation—especially if you do any Summarizing. For instance, if you "sneak" your comments in as part of a summary without allowing discussion, it may feel to others like you have an agenda separate from their work. How and when you include your comments is very important to group morale!

- If you are a participant in someone else's setting, your skills will be demonstrated as a representative and effective group member. You will have the opportunity to contribute in a special way because of your awareness of the issues. Remember that this is one model among many! Be careful not to impose your expectations of the process on someone else's work or on a different process.
- It is not possible for group members to have their whole life accessible to everyone at the table! Even when a facilitator asks good clarifying questions, group members will have to be responsible for saying out loud what is most important to include in this conversation. Ultimately a facilitator is neither an Expert in other Traditions nor responsible for knowing what lies behind a group member's personal responses. There will be times when even your best questions do not solicit a member's input.
- Group members can be quiet for many reasons: Personality, uncertainty about how to participate, a feeling of being an outsider, language and cultural barriers, physical issues like hearing loss or limited vision, etc.
 - If you have physical or cultural barriers to inclusion, try to address them before beginning the conversation. A shorter conversation with everyone included is better than a longer conversation with limited participation. If you have an unexpected barrier that can not be addressed immediately, enlist the aid of the group in determining how they will allow for that person's contribution in another way—e.g. submitting material through an interpreter.
 - If you have a dominating personality in your group, you may have to use some specific techniques for including quieter members:
 - 1) A group rule: No one may speak a second time till everyone has spoken once or chosen to pass.
 - 2) Summing up each section of the process by specifically asking each member of the group for their response.
 - 3) Opening each response time with a moment of quiet to allow (especially) introverts to think and make notes before responding.
- The first couple of circles allow group members to express their own experience of the situation, issue, or event that you are discussing. At the transition "From Feeling to Image: Describe" you are changing gears in a big way. You are now actively pursuing a group response. A group response doesn't necessarily mean unanimity or complete resolution. The beauty of beginning to respond together by trying to frame a metaphor is having an image to both push against and to use to imagine possibilities.

Take a couple minutes to let participants review the Circles of Meaning-Making guide for group use.

(20 min) In your groups of four, begin to use the Theological Reflection Circle by replaying the scenario from last week. *Distribute the handout, 'The Setback' Revisited.* These directions appear on the handout: Last week you analyzed how a conversation could unfold in three different ways. This week you are actually trying to get to 1) a group metaphor, 2) at least one thing you can say together, and 3) at least one action you could take together.

Elect a facilitator. Let the facilitator guide the group's work with the Theological Reflection Circle. Play a different role from the one you played last week. As you play your role, tell the group what relationship you had/have with the Center. (Be creative!)

05 min: Assignment and Closing Prayer

GATHERING PRAYER

LEADER: What a wild and wondrous world in which we live!
We are pinched by worries and crushed by concerns
even as we are uplifted by our dreams and inspired by the kindness of others.
Let us pause in this time and space to share what pinches or crushes us
as well as what uplifts and inspires us.
Let us pause to hear what we bring in our hearts today.

*After a minute of silent recollection, please feel free to share a phrase about how you are today:
Are you worried, concerned, uplifted, or inspired? What prompts you to say that today?*

After personal sharing, read this passage by Rev. Gary Kowalski:

LEADER: Gathered in our varied faiths,
We give thanks for the blessings of world community
As we share our common dream:

***ALL:** Homes and schools where children thrive,
Neighborhoods that are safe and clean,
A city rich in colors and cultures,
An economy where no one is expendable,
A beloved community where rich and poor alike have access to the
opportunity for a dignified and productive life,*

LEADER: Churches, mosques, synagogues and temples
Where our deepest hope is to be of service to a hurting world.

***ALL:** Enable us to carry forth this prayer,
Turning our thoughts toward charity,
Our hearts toward justice,
And our hands toward the work of peace.*

CLOSING PRAYER

LEADER: What can come of our world?
What can we imagine for it? What principles are we committed to putting to work this week?

*After a minute of silent recollection, please feel free to share a phrase about
How you will use what you learned this week.*

After personal sharing, reread this passage by Rev. Gary Kowalski:

LEADER: We share our common dream of churches, mosques, synagogues and temples
Where our deepest hope is to be of service to a hurting world.

***ALL:** Enable us as we leave this place
To carry forth this prayer into the coming week,
Our hearts toward justice,
And our hands toward the work of peace.*

HERMENEUTICS IS

The theory of interpretation of narratives: Texts, verbal, and non-verbal communications. It includes meanings & relationships of words & relationship of a part to the whole of a message

- Our lives are told as stories and our community's lives are told as stories.
- The core of any theology is narrative whether or not we're considering a Sacred Text.
 - We use Hermeneutics on our own stories and with our Tradition's stories.

Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Ruthellen Josselson offers this equation:

Life story= Interpretation + Construction

(5 min) **Work in pairs on these questions:**

- What is a Sacred Text or Sacred Story for you?
- What is the most important principle of interpretation—to you—for understanding that Story?
- What is the root of that principle? Who taught it to you? What does it help you do in your study?
- How has that principle helped or hindered you when talking with someone from a different Tradition?

(2 min) **Large group report: Instructor will facilitate this.**

(5 min) **Work in groups of four (two pairs) with these questions:**

FIRST: Tell the group your *partner's* first principle of interpretation.

- What similarities/differences do you hear in these descriptions?
- Is the difference you hear substantive? Are any of the principles directly opposed to each other?
- How would you function in a dialogue group that had opposing first principles? To what degree would you feel obliged to uphold yours? Would that be driven by emotion, your personal identity, your role in your community, or something else?

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PRINCIPLES FOR AMBASSADORS

HERMENEUTICS OF FAITH AND HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION

Rooted in the work of Philosopher, Paul Ricoeur

Described by Dr. Ruthellen Josselson

A) Faith and Suspicion are interviewing or reporting stances not character descriptions.
You can use both stances, but you can't combine them as they are fundamentally different.
Pay attention within yourself when you shift stances.

B) *A Hermeneutics of Faith* aims to restore a text in a life-history or Tradition.

The Listener tries to stay faithful to the symbols of communication
and attempts to fully appreciate both the perspective and message of the Storyteller.
The Storyteller is a truth-teller.

KEY SKILLS FOR YOU: REFLECTING BACK, RESTATING, AND EMPATHIZING

A Hermeneutics of Suspicion aims to demystify a text and get to core truth that is hidden.

The Listener suspects that the core of the story is concealed or masked and must be uncovered
and that symbols must be "decoded" to make it intelligible.
Truth won't be exposed without the Listener's help.

KEY SKILLS FOR YOU: CLARIFYING USING BOTH OPEN-ENDED AND DIRECT QUESTIONS

C) It is important that we be able to say what one of *our* first principles is because in our work:

We will ask others to do this...

We will only work with what someone has brought to the table verbally...

We will not work with what remains implicit or hidden...

This creates limits and possibilities...

GENERAL PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER

Do not compare your Tradition's best insights or practices with "their" worst insights or practices.

Healthy empathy and healthy skepticism are both valuable and should both be tempered.

- 1) Do not confuse practitioners with their Tradition.
- 2) Virtues of Humility and Hospitality are especially important in Hermeneutical appreciation.
- 3) Live within your Tradition's stories—don't just study them.

THE HERMENEUTICS OF FAITH AND THE HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION
DR. RUTHELLEN JOSSELSON, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

Article in: NARRATIVE INQUIRY, 14 (1), pp. 1-28

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Available at: <http://ruthellenjosselson.com/articles/Josselson.ni.14-1.1e.pdf>

This articles outlines the two kinds of Hermeneutics in the work of philosopher, Paul Ricoeur.
 In particular it looks at the influence of his framework on narrative research.

<p align="center">HERMENEUTICS OF FAITH: Aims to restore a text Stance of reporter= empathetic listening</p>	<p align="center">HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION: Aims to demystify a text Stance of reporter= probing discovery</p>
<p>Assumes person is expert on own experience and is both willing and able to share meaning</p>	<p>Recognizes that language and consciousness can be distorted or deceptive</p>
<p>Meanings are <i>relatively</i> transparent</p> <p>Construction <i>feels</i> like reporting</p> <p>Interpretation is to better describe [the experience] not diminish it</p>	<p>Everything is relative/ experiences aren't transparent</p> <p>Looks for underlying psychic/social foundations</p> <p>Interpretation tries to "tear away" masks, illusions, self-deception and materiality</p>
<p>Effort of interpreter=</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Remain faithful to intent of the narrator 2) Unearth inherent meanings and submit them to the narrator 3) Take consciousness of narrator seriously 	<p>Effort of interpreter=</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Seek the meta-narrative 2) Looks for pointers to the unsaid, unsayable, dangerous knowledge/memories, and contradictions 3) Distrusts consciousness
<p>Not a self-evident set of processes</p> <p>Begins with empathy; recognizes the setting of the encounter and the nature of relationships has influence</p>	<p>Uses signs and procedures for meaning-making and decoding</p> <p>Seeks to identify originating events, inserted issues that aren't named, emotional distress and self-evident assumptions</p>
<p>Biography is intentional and 'truth-telling.'</p> <p>Interpreter asks both: What is said? What is in the language?</p> <p>Uses a pattern for the biography. It includes things like: Vivid memories, coping after trauma, development of work identity, discontinuity over time, moral constructions, and historical setting</p>	<p>Narration= performance Narrators don't know or draw conclusions</p> <p>Scholar= critic Scholars are experts of interpretation— archeologists of persons seeking purposes of life</p>

THE HERMENEUTICS OF FAITH AND THE HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION cont.

<p>Hermeneutic is actually a circle: Meaning derives from the whole/ the whole is only constructed from parts Constant interplay or dialectic of local < > global Understanding requires contextual knowledge and language knowledge</p>	<p>Hermeneutic has multiple levels of interpretation Ricoeur: Restoration is about teleology of all life, What are the hopes, desires, intentions, and beliefs that frame the future?</p>
<p>Co-construction of reality [text] between narrator and reader/listener/interpreter Some researchers adopt non-traditional academic expressions to demonstrate this dynamic (e.g. Narrators are listed as co-authors on studies, reports may be done as performances or actual narratives)</p>	<p>Participants in current studies are subjects and reality is <i>not</i> co-constructed Dialog is with colleague/professional audience Believes that truth and foundations are sometimes obscured by “being too close”</p>
<p>Researchers must be rigorous in self-reflection: 1) Researchers must name biases/prejudices 2) Recognize influence on process 3) Name pertinent filters Researcher must balance capacities to <i>suspend</i> over-identification with group and <i>ability</i> to identify and/or understand group Researcher must identify the “implied” contract between researcher and subject and answer how much confidentiality is necessary? How do subjects feel if they are recognizable in a summary or report?</p>	<p>Researchers claims position of privilege: 1) Narration is an attempt at rhetorical persuasion, and the scholar is judge of ulterior motives 2) Careful documentation of process is required; empathy or “having a feeling for” is insufficient The researcher’s self can hide behind cognitive analysis and theory</p>

QUEENIE'S CASE

Queenie grew up Baptist and loved it. The fervor, the consistency of Bible study throughout life, and the independent spirit of her congregation kept her going whenever she flagged personally. Her pastor was deeply committed to community activism and had a spot in his heart for addicts. Many Twelve Step groups met at the church throughout the week. It was a strong example of the work of grace in the world.

Later in life, she knew she needed a change. Surprisingly she found herself drawn to the liturgical life at an Episcopal church. The consistency of liturgical forms allowed her to go deeper than the words. In fact, the rhythm and dialogic nature of the liturgy helped her deepen her prayer. Even more surprising, she learned the Episcopalians used more Scripture in the service than her previous church... Her new pastor was an organizational whiz and she had engaged the church in an active role with Habitat for Humanity.

Talking with her new Episcopal friends Queenie learned they didn't realize Baptists celebrated the Lord's Supper. When she visited with her Baptist friends they didn't know that Episcopalians were serious about community work. Growing up she had been told that liturgical and lectionary churches weren't Bible churches. She wondered how those characterizations had come about.

Queenie's move was *within* a Tradition and yet her two communities were strangers to each other. Queenie found she was grieved that two communities that she loved deeply, who had sustained her spiritually in different phases of her journey, knew so little of each other's practice. This woman could have been put off from either church by the stories she'd heard. Why wasn't she?

- What do you imagine Queenie did to frame her questions and experience to allow her to move and still be faithful to her Tradition?
- What can Queenie's Hermeneutic teach us about upholding our Tradition and still being able to move in dialogue?

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- What do you imagine Queenie did to frame her questions and experience to allow her to move and still be faithful to her Tradition?
- What can Queenie's Hermeneutic teach us about upholding our Tradition and still being able to move in dialogue?

CIRCLES OF MEANING-MAKING & MOVEMENTS WITH A GROUP

Adapted from the work of Killen & deBeer

Remember Killen and deBeer's admonition: Don't move to meaning too quickly!

EXPERIENCE/EVENT: Starts with what has happened to us personally in this situation. Account for the inner and outer dimensions that each member of the group brings to the discussion. Notice that each participant has a huge amount of "data" outside the 'circle' of FOCUS. Make it clear to group members that what is not said will not be considered in making choices. Emphasize that each member must carefully choose what he or she brings to the conversation. Generally, if it's not presented verbally, it won't be included in the conversation.

Action: Something done, lived narrative

Culture: Group identities, social patterns of interaction, physical environment

Position: Attitudes, opinions, beliefs, convictions

Tradition: Sources of authority

Help your group:

Describe using the 5 senses and Who/What/Where/When/How. DO NOT ask Why at this point.

Narrate flow: Notice what is dynamic, what is constant, and what is largely overlooked.

Keep group members on track with "I" messages and personal FOCUS.

Suspend judgments about each other; notice how group members interact.

From Experience to Feeling: Focus

FEELING: Actual physical sensations, the affective undercarriage, and the potency of the experience for each group member. Acknowledge tensions but don't let them become clutter.

Emotional energy: Power and vulnerability

Tension: Where things are being pulled apart or stretched

Clarification: Embedded questions

Focus/Issues: Values, wisdom, connections to the transcendent

Help your group:

Create a space that is different from cultural expressions or expectations when such a group is together.

Describe the physical sensations and affect without judgment. Welcome and articulate feelings!

Keep feelings in "I" messages. Never allow "you" statements.

Remember that feelings do not have a valence in this process but behaviors and feelings are valued differently in different Traditions. Feelings that have positive and negative connotations in any given Tradition are not treated as good or bad at this point, they just are.

Listen for the points of greatest intensity: Reframe 'hot' point through questions.

Determine what is the undergirding value or volatility for each member.

Most situations are beyond a one-conversation solution: Pursue what's most pressing for the group.

From Feeling to Image: Describe

IMAGE: Idioms, metaphors, references (literary, cultural, religious.) This is the 'circle' in which you begin to craft a common response by finding a metaphor that draws together what group members have shared. Be playful and respectful.

Compare: Congruence with idiom/metaphor/reference

Extend: Logical conclusions and fanciful possibilities

Contrast: Disparity with idiom/metaphor/reference

Develop: Flesh out the picture

Help your group:

Recognize this the true beginning of group work. Members are moving from naming personal responses to drawing their experiences together. You are seeking an image that is a gestalt or totality.

This pulls together and breaks open the event. It encourages deeper openness.

CIRCLES OF MEANING-MAKING & MOVEMENTS WITH A GROUP Cont.

IMAGE Cont.

Avoid controlling or suppressing the image, do not predict full meaning, analyze, or problem-solve

This is an easy point for folks to jump out of the process because

- It feels like insight is achieved
- It feels like going further might make the vulnerability painful in front of strangers
- We prefer either-or so this point seems to give folks a choice (accept/reject image)

Instead go deeper: Understand *everyone* has a symbolic matrix.

Explore how different Traditions contribute to understanding the symbol or metaphor you're considering.

From Image to Insight: Explore

INSIGHT: Shift in power, vision, possibility, energy. The goal is simple: To further explore what we can say together and how we can use the metaphor to guide a common response.

Concepts: Spiritual essentials, practices, tweakings

Human being: Categories of human capacity and ability

World: Mental models, history, community

Ultimate being: Categories of immanence/transcendence and enduring meaning

Help your group:

Accurately describe the change that happens as different members continue crafting the metaphor.

Symbolic matrices are all about patterns and themes. Look for patterns and themes in the exchange.

"Aha!" is insufficient in this case as much as individually but it may open the door to real insight.

Understand that insight is really not accidental. It is a product of openness and discipline:

Be open to each other.

Be disciplined in questions and realize that while not all insights are created equal

It is important to consider them all.

Depth, value and need are all different and figure in how you craft the dialogue.

From Insight to Action: Change

CHANGE/ACTION: Addresses: What difference does this conversation make?

Do not pursue "the imaginary perfect solution" but open the group to "action on a possible good."

Do not make a decision too hastily. Conversely do not bypass incremental options.

Help your group:

Decide how to put your dialogue into action.

What inertia and/or resistance must be overcome?

What is needed to take the next step?

- Prayer: continued reflection and dialogue together?
- Plan: tools, strategies, skills, resources for the community?
- People: lines of accountability?

Articulate what is left untended and what might need to be revisited in future conversations.

'THE SETBACK' REVISITED

Last week you analyzed how a conversation could unfold in three different ways. This week you are actually trying to get to:

- 1) a group metaphor,
- 2) at least one thing you can say together, and
- 3) at least one action you could take together.

Elect a facilitator. Let the facilitator guide the group's work with the Theological Reflection Circle.

Play a different role from the one you played last week. As you play your role, tell the group what relationship you had/have with the Center. (Be creative!)

The Four Characters

- A)** I believe I am a responsible agent helping heal the world. My primary goal is to hold a friendly and fruitful argument that allows us to consider our options for restoring or cutting services. My secondary goal is for us to make a solid ethical choice and act on it quickly.

- B)** I realize that not even this devastating situation is permanent, but compassion demands that we work together to strengthen the community and address the pain it is in as well as plan for the gap in services.

- C)** I believe the individual is the central concern of our work. My goal is to assure that everyone concerned maintains as much autonomy as possible while getting the basics that they need.

- D)** I am here to serve God and neighbor. My goal for being here is to assure that we consider the poorest and weakest members (of our community) first in any of our decisions or planning.

The Setback

A community center has burned down in the middle of the night. Fortunately, no one was injured or killed. But the loss includes facilities for:

- Daycare for 15 infants and toddlers, open 6:30 am-6:30 pm, M-Sa
- An after-school program for 45 grade school children, open 2:30-8:30 pm, M-F
- A hospitality meal for financially challenged neighbors on Friday evenings
- A gym for Upward Bound Sports and open gym time for center members from 3-5 pm, M-Sa
- A teen lounge with WiFi and computers for homework open 2:30-8:30 pm, M-F
- A job skills screening office, open 10 am-2pm, M-F
- Hosting at least one youth club a day, M-Sa (e.g. JA, Leo Club, Adventure Scouts, etc.)
- A Saturday family exercise program meeting at 9 am, 11 am, and 1:30 pm

Because of the diversity of programs, many families have found a second home at the facility. Most families are working class and pay for services with a mixture of money and volunteering. At least 75% of children using the center qualify for free or reduced cost meals. The center is on a public bus line. The center is safe, affordable, and convenient to the neighborhood—and truly tended by the people it serves.

Unfortunately, nothing of comparable size (50,000 sq ft) is in the neighborhood or on this bus line. Although insurance was in force and is sufficient to rebuild the center, the process will take 12-18 months. The interfaith community has gathered at a church this morning to consider what should be done to help neighbors in that interim.

HOMWORK SESSION 3

Choose and complete **ONE** of the following.

1) RESEARCH one of your organization's interfaith partners.

- a) How did your organizations become partners?
- b) What issues make cooperation and collaboration easy? What issues make it difficult? What principles of interpretation did they use to discern how to address this?
- c) Are there any things on which your organizations cannot work together? How do both organizations deal with this?

2) INTERVIEW three people of different Traditions with these three questions:

- a) What does your Tradition teach about service? Who is your premier model of this?
- b) How do the teaching and exemplar influence you when working with others? How do you evaluate whether or not a ministry or service is appropriate for your Tradition?
- c) Who do you admire from another Tradition for his/her service? Why?

3) Visit these websites and REFLECT on the questions below:

US Passports and International Travel @ US Department of State:
Regulations regarding religious dress and ID photos

<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/passports/photos/photos.html>

OSHA @ the United States Department of Labor:

Old Amish and Sikh exempt from hard hat regulations

https://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=DIRECTIVES&p_id=1789

Legal Information Institute of Cornell Law School:

Use of peyote in Indian Religion

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/42/1996a>

- a) How do faith practices and American life mix for you? What Hermeneutics do you apply to sort out which is which?
- b) When you consider working across Traditional lines, what questions do you have about others' mix of faith and Americanism? What do these questions reveal about your Hermeneutics?
- c) What values do your faith and Americanism hold in common? Do you think of yourself as _____ American or American _____ (e.g. Sikh American or American Sikh)—and which one is the primary identity and which the qualifier for you?