

**“Educating for Relationship –
Insights of the Benedictine Tradition for Contemporary Catholic Education.”**

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The ancient text of the Rule of St Benedict has endured because of its insight into the importance of relationship as a pedagogy of formation and leadership. The workshop will explore that insight in dialogue with the document on Catholic Education, Educating Together in Catholic Schools (2007) and through the lens of the significance of ‘listening’ as a key Benedictine value and proposed by the French writer, Simone Weil as the key to education. The workshop will invite participants to consider how this might achieve expression both as leaders in their communities and in the culture of the educational community itself particularly in a socially diverse context

1. The Context: Relationship under Stress

Some years ago, the Australian writer and cartoonist, Michael Leunig penned a very thoughtful article, “In the midst of madness.”¹ He began the essay observing that, “on street corners, people talk of the growing madness. They speak in a dialect that survives in the instincts of young and old, rich and poor, males and females . . . ‘The world has gone mad,’ they say. In tones of dismay, resignation and humour they confirm their suspicions to each other. It’s as if this a new kind of greeting or farewell.” Yet, as Leunig comments, “it is also their small way of grieving together about the tragic state of their world; about the destruction of meaning or the rise of hostility, ugliness and stupidity in an angry, exhausted culture.”

This is hardly new as Leunig suggests, “Of course, this windswept conversation on street corners is ancient. With a twinkling smile my grandmother used to offer me the old refrain, ‘The whole world is mad except for you and me – and even you’re a little strange.’” There is, however, a new dimension to it all, according to Leunig. “There have never been so many people on the planet to lose their marbles and there have never been such powerful and precocious devices, machines and weapons to express and give form to insanity. Their looming presence has given rise to an unprecedented critical mass of fear and anger on the planet – enough to drive humanity into panic and over the edge.” Leunig is of the opinion that we seem to live in a time where there is a “surge of a compulsive new bitterness and hostility, an antisocial infection . . . it is the driver behind you, angrily blasting their horn because your acceleration at the green light is not fast enough. It is the righteous ugly clash of a televised political debate, the spiteful intensity and punishing fury of a gender equality discussion . . .”

This fear and anger are amplified, perhaps, by the ever-increasing erosion of trust we have in institutions and people. There is hardly a sphere of our life that is not affected by this erosion. We have been so charred by the failings and inadequacies of our Church, by the constancy of the exposure of crimes against children and others, that much of what we have placed our trust in has been ruined. Our trust has died. Our trust in the Church has died. But not only the Church. We have contended with the exposure of intimidation and assault from the stars and celebrities of the entertainment industry through the MeToo movement. Our trust in other institutions such as the financial sector has also died. Our trust in institutions to keep our aged and those with disability safe has died. In the meantime, the calibre of world leadership, or lack thereof, leave us confounded. Bernard Salt, writing recently in *The Australian*, has suggested that our own decade is the one in which trust has gone bust. Our social trust has died. The edifice of institutions including our own Church is shattered, and we are left with a sense of ruin. And as Salt comments, “the loss trust breeds cynicism and creates social division; it rationalises self-interest; it is the antithesis of a united, loving and generous society.”²

¹ Michael Leunig, “In the Midst of Madness,” *Spectrum, The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30-31 July 2016, 8-9.

² Bernard Salt, *The Australian*, 30 March 2019.

As Leunig concluded in his provocative article, the thought of focusing on the effects of all this on our collective mental health is “too hard to deal with and there is no Minister for Mental Health to take the initiative. After all, isn’t madness so common that it has become banal? . . . Madness is not the elephant in the lounge room, it is actually the lounge room. This is the normal lounge room where citizens may sit and digest the stupefying corrosive lunacy of television.”

Against this background, it is not a surprise then that Pope Francis suggests today we are faced with new poverties.

. . . Because of the changes of our globalized world, some material and spiritual poverties have multiplied . . . Requested of us, therefore, is to remain vigilant as watchmen, so that it will not happen that, in face of the poverties produced by the culture of wellbeing, the eyes of Christians are weakened and become incapable of looking at the essential.³

One of the new poverties we face is the confusion between the breadth of connection with depth of communication – the theme of the 2019 Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Social Justice Statement, *Making it Real: Genuine Human Encounter in our Digital World*. As Bishop Brady highlights in the Foreword to the Statement, “People of all generations hunger for friendship and genuine human encounter because we are made for community. Our digital world enables us to be more connected than ever before, but sadly it can also be a place of manipulation, exploitation and violence.” The Statement therefore speaks to the remarkable paradox of our current age: never before have we been so connected; never before have we experienced such isolation.

All this occurs, as Hugh Mackay, the Australian social researcher, adroitly commented some years ago, because of the temptation to confuse data transfer with human communication.

It’s easy, but wrong, to assume that because I’ve sent you some data and you’ve sent some back, that is an alternative to what Gates calls “direct interaction.” It’s not an alternative: it’s a different process altogether. Email (or text, or whatever’s next) can never do the whole job of communication because the human stuff – the emotions, the nuances, the things you’d normally convey through tone of voice, rate of speech, posture, gesture, eye movements – is all lost.

So, the great irony of the IT revolution is that when it comes to the subtlety of our exchanges with each other, we are being conditioned to settle for much less than pre-revolutionary generations had to work with. More and more data: less and less communication.⁴

As another commentator, Chad Taylor observes,

There’s a difference between staying in touch with your friends and telling all of them the same thing at once . . . Facebook isn’t socializing: its broadcasting . . . Direct contact is the basis of a true relationship. Writing a letter, picking up a phone, hey – even meeting in person. The positive action that provokes a response is the bricks and mortar of a real relationship.⁵

³ Pope Francis, 30 June 2016.

⁴ Hugh Mackay, “The Technology Disconnect,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 August 2007. See also Hugh Mackay, *Advance Australia – Where?* 99-136; Peter Munro, “Lost in Cyber Space,” *The Sunday Examiner Magazine*, 29 November 2009, pages 10-11.

⁵ Chad Taylor, “Off his Facebook” *Sydney Morning Herald, Sunday Life*, date unknown, 21.

It means that our deeply social nature and ecology as persons is under stress and threat. We see a break down in the way in which people discover and enjoy community – a way of being in relationship that the social networking capabilities of the IT revolution cannot adequately address. If there be a crisis in meaning today, if there is a breakdown in faith, or indeed, any crisis of morality, it is primarily because there is a breakdown in genuine, transforming community. Meaning emerges innately in the experience of relationship, of human bonding, of community, - all of which become the fulcrum of human conscience. Take away relationship, you take away meaning, you take away morality.

As an aside, one of my small claims to fame is that I was in correspondence with the late Princess of Wales. I should hasten to add that the full extent of the correspondence between us was a mass produced card of gratitude from Kensington Palace in response to my rather lengthy epistle to Diana in which I had expressed gratitude for a comment she made during her famous – or infamous – 1995 BBC television interview with Martin Bashir.⁶ In that much publicized exchange I had been remarkably struck by the explanation of her struggle with royal politics which had rendered her particularly vulnerable. Diana put forward, “there’s no better way to dismantle a personality than to isolate it.” I thought this an extraordinarily accurate statement. I heard it with clarity, and I wrote to her to share how accurately she had given expression to one of the deepest truths we know about ourselves, one so clearly obvious but one we often overlook.

In a time when people can so easily experience a great sense of isolation, the experience of community especially emerges as important and part of what is essential for us. Michael Leunig once commented to me that we are in need of a new legislative framework that can deal with what he termed, crimes against community. Perhaps he was being somewhat idealistic, but certainly what is required, however, are ever fresh initiatives in which we draw people – particularly our young people – into experiences of community in which the genuinely human bonds of relationship can be experienced, engaged and entertained. Knowing we are part of a community, belonging to a community, participating in a community and constructing a community can be one of the most powerful anti-dotes to the experience of isolation. This is why it is important to value and to give thanks for the community of which we are part. Such a community can remind us in often hidden ways the most important truth we will ever learn – which is that happiness is always shared, and that we are never more alive when we find ourselves in relationship with others. We are reminded that we come to the truth of who we are never alone but always in companionship with others.

And for this reason, the word of the Gospel, and the richness of our Benedictine Tradition, never loses its freshness and possibility.

Questions for Discussion:

Where do we see our own students drifting into the creeping isolation created by the confusion of the breadth of connection with the depth of communication?

What other factors lead our students into isolation?

Where do we see signs of the movement towards new forms of community? And what do they have to teach us?

2. The Opportunity of our Tradition

Mental health is always precious and vulnerable, declares Leunig. “It is a fragile ecosystem; a garden that needs constant nourishment, love and attention. We would do well to value it and be careful about what we allow in our minds. Sanity needs what is real and thrives on what is beautiful and true.” And how is sanity ensured, asks Leunig? “Sanity lies in the integration of opposites, the capacity to

⁶ See <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/royals/interviews/bbc.html>, accessed 16 July 2010.

open and broaden consciousness – enough to gracefully hold two seemingly opposite things together and reflect rather than react. To be enlivened by paradox. This is a life-time’s work. This is sanity.” And it is the contribution of love. As Leunig writes, people lament about the state of the world, but “they also yearn. Sanity may not prevail, but it lives on as a vision of love somewhere in the minds of ordinary people.”⁷

It is also preserved within our own Benedictine perspective on life. It is immediately clear that Benedictine Spirituality enjoys a profound attention to the primacy of persons.⁸

- Above all he must not show too great a concern for the fleeting and temporal things of this world, neglecting or treating the welfare of those entrusted to him. Rather he should keep in mind that he has undertaken the care of souls for whom he must give an account (RB2: 33-34)
- Let him strive to be loved rather than feared (64: 15)
- Let the abbot recognise that his goal must be profit for the monks, not pre-eminence for himself (64:8)
- Serving a variety of temperaments, coaxing, reproofing, and encouraging as appropriate (RB2:31)
- Accommodating and adapting himself to each one’s character and intelligence (RB2:32)
- The emphasis on person suggests to him a range of attitudes and behaviours, some to be developed, others avoided.
 - “choosing the appropriate moment and explain patiently . . . without pride, obstinacy or refusal (RB68:2-3)

Throughout the Rule the monks are always referred to as brothers, not as sons.

The spirit is one of respect, patience and self-transcending love. It is a love that invites rather than demands, encourages rather than impels. The Benedictine disciple is to be alert, vigilant, watchful – not in the sense of suspicious, but wary of anything that could inhibit growth in the community, and aware of the possibilities that are creative. They pay attention, take care, are concerned about the state of those for whom they have responsibility:

Cura and curare: 15 times

Sollicitus and sollicitudo: 16 times

And they are those who are able to hold paradox – the secret of sanity, according to Leunig. The wisdom of the Rule and its secret to its long sustainability is precisely because it breathes an abundance of sets of tensions. *Ora et labora*. Never one thing without the other.

Therefore, a Catholic school, formed out of the Benedictine Tradition, should be situated specially to counter the kinds of experiences about which we have been speaking and to address the factors which tend to the isolation inherent in the social climate in which we live.

Why is this so?

⁷ Michael Leunig, “In the Midst of Madness,” *Spectrum, The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30-31 July 2016, 8-9.

⁸ See David Tomlins, “Monasticism and Ministry: Insights from St. Benedict on Pastoral Care.” *Tjurunga* 78 (May 2010), 5-14; and Michael Casey, “In Anticipation of an Abbatial Election,” *Tjurunga* 78 (May 2010), 72-100.

First and foremost, the Catholic school runs on the very premise of a story of community. At the heart of its life, runs the story of God as Triune, the radical Christian imagination of God disclosed to us through the story of Jesus. As disciples of Jesus, we worship a God who is Community. This is a mystery of communion, a circle of life, of understanding and of love. It is a mystery of mutuality, reciprocity and dialogue: a community of persons in which each is defined in, through, with, by, and from 'the other.' The relationship of which the famous icon of Andrei Rublev bespeaks, the hospitality that it invites thought the space around the table left open for ourselves, offers us hope because it offers us the truth of both God and of ourselves. To believe in this mystery is to affirm that at the heart of all creation beats the impulse and the drive towards relationship. To be made in the image of this God means that we ourselves are made for relationship, that we exist in relationship or not at all. To proclaim such divinity is to assert that humanity itself is achieved only within an ever-deepening experience of relationship. As Rublev's *Trinity* is an icon of the living triune God so our Christian communities are to be living icons of the Mystery which has called them into existence. How well do our various Christian communities - and for our purposes here, our schools - present as such living icons of this amazing Mystery? In other words when people look upon our own educational community, do they experience the same possibility and invitation as disclosed in the icon itself? How, then, do we keep this story at the heart of our community's life; how do we enable it to have animating effect on the culture of the school community and not just on the culture of the school but especially on the lives of our students who are drawn from a society increasingly marked by isolation.

3. An Education for Relationship

In the discussion on Catholic Education today we often hear reference to "the value-added possibility" of our systems. That is, our mission is not simply the provision of quality education but about something more. Yes, this is certainly about the formation of our students in faith. However, I want to suggest that it is also about something that must accompany this essentially – the formation to community. For community will always be the hearth of faith.

To underpin this, I wish to retrieve the document from the Vatican's Congregation for Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools* (2007)

The Catholic school, characterized mainly as an educating community, is a school for the *person and of persons*. In fact, it aims at forming the *person in the integral unity of [their] being*, using the tools of teaching and learning where "criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life" are formed. Above all, they are involved in the dynamics of interpersonal relations that form and vivify the school community. [Italics in the original]⁹

The same document goes on to say:

The Catholic educational community is able to *educate for communion*, which, as a gift that comes from above, animates the project of formation for living together in harmony and being welcoming. Not only does it cultivate in the students the cultural values that derive from the Christian vision of reality, but it also involves each of them in the life of the community, where values are mediated by authentic interpersonal relationships among the various members that form it, and by the individual and community acceptance of them.. In this way, the life of communion of the educational community assumes the value

⁹ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A shared mission between consecrated persons and the lay faithful*, (8 September 2007), (Strathfield, NSW: St. Pauls Publications, 2008), n. 13. The reference in this quote is to Paul VI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), n. 19: AAS 8 (197), 18.

of an educational principle, of a paradigm that directs its formational action as a service for the achievement of a culture of communion. Education in the Catholic school, therefore, through the tools of teaching and learning, “is not given for the purposes of gaining power but as an aid towards a fuller understanding of, and communion with [others], events and things.” This principle affects every scholastic activity, the teaching and even all the after-school activities such as sport, theatre and commitment in social work, which promote the creative contribution of the students and their socialization.¹⁰

All of this extends the teaching of the late John Paul II penned at the beginning of the new millennium, To make the Church *the home and the school of communion*: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings But what does this mean in practice? . . . Before making practical plans, we need *to promote a spirituality of communion*, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed. A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as “those who are part of me.” This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a ‘gift for me.’ A spirituality of communion means, finally to know how to ‘make room’ for our brothers and sisters, bearing ‘each others’ burdens (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, “masks” of communion rather than a means of expression and growth.¹¹

We are those committed to fostering this spirituality within our school communities. It becomes incumbent upon each of us no matter our role – whether this be as teacher or administrator or in an ancillary role - to be agents of communion, and, from a theological perspective, to be committed to this spirituality of communion.

How does this look like in my own school?

What helps?

What inhibits?

¹⁰ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A shared mission between consecrated persons and the lay faithful*, (8 September 2007), (Strathfield, NSW: St. Pauls Publications, 2008), n. 39.

¹¹ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, “At the beginning of the new millennium,” Apostolic Letter (6 January 2001), n.43.

4. Forming Agents of Dialogue

Further, this must develop cultures of mission in which we strive for communities of inclusion, outreach and critique of those factors and forces that engender alienation and estrangement, animating a culture in which exclusion is transformed into embrace.¹²

This is to work for a culture in which we collectively work in appropriate ways for a more just, and participative, community, stretching us to assume a prophetic voice in social justice, and to address those social forces which work to exclude others. It is a culture that finds expression when we are committed to enabling our students with a critical faculty to the presence of injustice and exclusion. As the same document referred to above, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools*, suggests,

Educating in communion and for communion means directing students to grow authentically as persons who “gradually learn to open themselves up to life as it is, and to create in themselves a definite attitude to life” that will help them to open their views and their hearts to the world that surrounds them, able to see things critically, with a sense of responsibility and a desire for a constructive commitment. [Italics in the original]¹³

Thus the school is to be a place in which people are formed, “in such a way as to respect the identity, culture, history, religion and especially the suffering and needs of others, conscious that “we are all really responsible for all.”¹⁴ It is this that provides our schools with their particularly prophetic dimension. As the same document goes on to say,

Now, this community environment appears as a privileged place for the formation of young people in the construction of a world based on dialogue and the search for communion, rather than in contrast; on the mutual acceptance of differences rather than on their opposition. In this way, with its educational project taking inspiration from ecclesial communion and the civilization of love, the Catholic school can contribute considerably to illuminating the minds of many, so that “there will arise a generation of new persons, the moulders of a new humanity.”¹⁵

And in this we are forming students for social dialogue:

In turn, *dialogue*, the fruit of knowledge, must be cultivated for people *to co-exist and build up a civilization of love*. It is not a matter of playing down the truth, but of realizing the aim of education which “has a particular role to play in building a more united and peaceful world. It can help to affirm that integral humanism, open to life’s ethical and religious dimension, which appreciates the importance of understanding and showing esteem for other cultures and the spiritual values present in them.” Within intercultural education, this dialogue aims “to eliminate tensions and conflicts, and potential confrontations by a better understanding among the various religious cultures of any given region. It may contribute to purifying cultures from any dehumanizing elements, and thus be an agent of transformation. It can also help to uphold certain traditional cultural values which are under threat from modernity and the levelling down which indiscriminate internationalization may bring with it.”

¹² The term ‘from exclusion to embrace’ is taken from the work of Miroslav Volf. See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

¹³ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools*, n. 43. The quotation refers to the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, (19 March 1977), n.12.

¹⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools*, n. 44.

¹⁵ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools*, n.44.

“Dialogue is very important for our own maturity, because in confronting another person, confronting other cultures, and also confronting other religions in the right way, we grow; we develop and mature ... This dialogue is what creates peace”, affirmed Pope Francis.¹⁶

5. The Two Benedictine Keys -

a. Ausculta – Learning how to truly listen

In her “Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies,” Simone Weil proposes that the development of attentiveness is the primary purpose of education.¹⁷ Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object. It means holding that which is perceived. “Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is penetrated.” She goes on to say, elsewhere, that “We do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them.” St. Benedict, many centuries earlier knew this. As we know so well the Rule begins with a single, simple word, “Ausculta!” Listen with the ear of your heart. Listen, with your ears and eyes; listen with the expectation of hearing as if one were to knock on a door with the expectation of hearing a reply from the other side. We are to bring that alertness, that attentiveness to all that we do in life. Consequently, he teaches that we are to use our tools and utensils in the same way we would the sacred vessels of the altar (RB 31:10). Living in the present moment is perhaps the key to this powerful and enlivening attitude of heart. Living in the present moment means simply doing what you are doing with great attention. It was one of the great insights of the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the fourth century. The disciple would come for instruction and say, “I am interested in finding the true self and becoming a contemplative. What should I do?” the Desert guides would reply simply, “Do what you are doing.” Which means bring your attention to the present moment and to whatever is its immediate content and keep it there.¹⁸

This finds its modern expression in what Metz terms “the mysticism of open eyes” – for not just the ears but the eyes also are organs for listening (Matt 13)

Christian witnessing to God is guided through and through by political spirituality, a political mysticism. Not a mysticism of political power and political domination, but rather – to speak metaphorically – a mysticism of open or opened eyes. Not only the ears for hearing, but also the eyes are organs of grace! . . . With all respect for Eastern mysticism and spirituality let me stress . . . In the end Jesus did not teach an ascending mysticism of closed eyes, but rather a God-mysticism with an increased readiness for perceiving, a mysticism of open eyes, which sees more and not less. It is a mysticism that especially makes visible all invisible and inconvenient suffering, and – convenient or not – pays attention to it and takes responsibility for it, for the sake of a God who is a friend to human beings.¹⁹

¹⁶ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools; Living in Harmony for a Civilisation of Love*, (Vatican City 2013), n.20.

¹⁷ Simone Weil, “Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies,” *Waiting on God* (London: Collins Fontana books 1950).

¹⁸ Thomas Keating ocsa, “The Practice of Attention/Intention,” in *Contemplative Outreach News*, 10 (1996:1), 4.

¹⁹ Metz, *A Passion for God: The mystical-political dimension of Christianity*, translated by J. Matthew Ashley, (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1998); 163. Metz is clear that he is not advocating a partisan politics: “The task of the Church is not a systematic social doctrine, but a *social criticism*. . . [Thus] the Church, defined as social-critical institution, does not become a political ideology. No political party can have this criticism as its sole plank. Moreover, no political party can embrace in its political activity the whole scope of the Church’s social criticism which covers the whole of history under God’s eschatological proviso, otherwise it would drift into either romanticism or totalitarianism.” Metz, “The Church’s Social Function in the Light of a ‘Political Theology,’” in *Faith and the World of Politics*, edited by Johannes B. Metz, *Concilium* 36, (New York/Glen Rock, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1968) 17-18. [Italics in the original].

LISTENING

The mat of welcoming
The test of intention
The sign of communication
The mark of good will
The cradle of attention
The bridge of gender

The door of hospitality
The teacher of respect
The protein of growing
The permit of searching
The strength of friendship
The bed of intimacy

The window of openness
The key to understanding
The foundation of learning
The seed of encouragement
The voice of confidence
The fibre of commitment

The ear of the heart
The memory of trust
The relief of anger
The key of forgiveness
The balm of healing
The anchor of peace

The hand of support
The soil of nurturing
The invitation to risk
The means of change
The sound of leadership
The seat of wisdom

The lining of love
The meaning of prayer
The home of the spirit
The path of salvation
The gate of heaven
The touch of God

Roman Paur osb 1995

2. *Conversatio* – Learning how to truly converse

It is intriguing how Thomas Merton's last journal was entitled, "A vow of conversation" - a pun on the monastic vow of 'conversion of manners', one of the three Benedictine vows. We should not be surprised at the similarity of the two words. Conversation leads to conversion. In conversation I risk my present self-understanding by facing the claims to attention of the other with whom I am conversing. Conversation is a process of two people understanding each other. Each other open themselves to the other, truly accepts the other's point of view as worthy of consideration and gets inside the other in order to understand them better. Good conversations are events which happen; they take on their own turns, reaching their own conclusions. The partners in the conversation are then far less its leaders than those being led. In a good conversation there is an openness, a readiness to explore, to ask questions. Good conversation always leads to conversion. Change is inevitable-either radically, or at least in the acknowledgment that the once merely different is now genuinely a possibility for me. It is precisely in the conversation open to the Stranger, paradigmatically expressed in the Emmaus story of Luke 24, where fear is transformed into possibility, doubt into courage and self-enclosure into a generous openness of spirit that the Kingdom of God is made present in the world. Happy then the person who has learnt to converse for the future will be theirs.

In a pluralist society, particularly, the loss of conversation is a sure highway to a fragmentation leading to the formation of ghettos. If pluralism is not to denigrate into some kind of lazy liberal tolerance where there is a loss of the sense of the common good beyond the upholding of individual rights, conversation must be a strategy at the forefront of our social endeavour. As David Tracy would say about this pluralist, postmodern time, "Conversation is our only hope." To lose the art of conversation is to face the steady privatisation of life and even of relationship itself; it is to see the horizons of our life become more and more narrow, more and more truncated. And in the openness, we bring to

conversation, not only does a greater reality, Truth itself, manifests itself but the other becomes truly (br)other. We need to take Louis Massignon's words to heart, that "only in exercising hospitality towards another (instead of colonising him), in sharing the same work, the same bread, as honourable companions, can one understand the Truth that unites us socially . . . One can only find truth through the practice of hospitality."

Conversation thus develops into hospitality. The two are integrally linked. Conversation is born out of the hospitable heart and conversation leads into hospitality.

Pope Paul 6 was keenly aware of this. In his first encyclical *Ecclesia Suam* he spoke of the need for dialogue in the same way we are speaking of conversation. He spoke there of the dialogue of salvation and the circles of dialogue that the Church needed to be seized by-the multifaceted conversation the Church needed to entertain. And he spoke of the characteristics of the dialogue he believed as an appropriate method for accomplishing the apostolic mission. He even went so far to call this dialogue an example of the art of spiritual communication involving clear thinking, humility, trust, confidence and friendship, prudence. It is a description which Nouwen refines much later by explaining hospitality as the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. He describes how we must forget ourselves in order to let the other person approach us. We must be able to open to them to let their distinctive personality unfold-even though it often frightens us. We often keep the other down; we only see what we want to see; then we never really encounter the mysterious secret of their being, only ourselves. Because we do not risk the poverty of openness our lives are not ground with the warm fullness of human existence. We are left only with a shadow of our real self.

It is to this that Pope Francis is constantly alluding to in the challenges he puts before us in the experience of migration.

What means are we using our students to deepen their capacity to listen and to widen their capability for conversation as instruments for a prophetic life?