
'Co-Listening' at the Cathedral and Beyond

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Rev. Dr. Thee Smith**

*Let each of us look-out
not only for our own matters
but also for what matters to each other.*
—Philippians 2:4

A favorite scene in the comic film *Ghostbusters* occurs when the three 'doctors'—Venkman (Bill Murray), Stantz (Dan Aykroyd), and Spengler (Harold Ramis)—don white lab jackets and stage a TV commercial. There they make the hilarious offer "to serve all your supernatural elimination needs." My choice punch line occurs in the final scene as they chant together: "We're ready to believe you!"

Well, we're ready to listen to you! But my preferred best-practice calls for co-listening with you!

'Co-listening' is a simple but potentially powerful practice where two people take turns listening to each other. Its simplicity tempts us to minimize the benefits, however. So this summer I'm beginning co-listening classes at the Cathedral. All interested persons are invited to attend one or more of three sample sessions offered in the next few weeks and instructed by yours truly. These "Introduction to Co-Listening" classes will teach and enhance peer coaching skills that make it possible to maximize one's personal growth and interpersonal goals as fully as one chooses. Remarkable results can be achieved by people across all age groups and multiple backgrounds who learn to listen effectively.

Now, a note about me as course instructor. I'm most familiar as a priest associate here at the Cathedral. If you've heard me preach you also recall references to my vocation as a religion professor at Emory University. However, my offering these classes proceeds from many years of membership in the international leadership organization described at www.rc.org. In that regard other experienced leaders in our community will join me in teaching this 12-week course. But apart from the full multi-week series, attending one of the introductory evenings offers you an opportunity to explore a practice that I have found to be life-defining and that I commend to everyone I can.

Of course all these vocational interests can be related. Consider for example the following internet sites that connect listening with ministry and spirituality:

- [Listening Is a Ministry and Discipline | Psychology Today](#)
- [Listening Skills Training for Accurate Empathy | Ministry Tools Resource Center](#)
- [Listening and Caring Skills in Ministry: A Guide for Groups and Leaders](#)
- [Ministry of Listening - SlideShare](#)
- [Listening - A Divine Activity](#) (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, etc.)

Nonetheless these "Introduction to Co-Listening" classes are not—I repeat, NOT—explicitly related to ministry or spirituality. Rather they proceed from a natural human process common to all people; the process of sharing life experiences with one another, particularly feelings involving hurts and distresses, in order to find mutual healing, recovery or transformation. Thus the framework for these classes is universal, secular or diverse, in order to remain inclusive of all

backgrounds, identities and experiences.

That being said I would not be a priest if I did not integrate co-listening practices with spiritual commitments also. In that connection I commend co-listening as beneficial for enhancing Christ-like empathy and mutuality (see Philippians 2:4 quoted above). Beyond the personal and interpersonal dimension, moreover, I have found the social change applications equally compelling. If that interests you, please browse the links to “Human Liberation” at www.rc.org. Details about when and where the classes meet are below. Remember, we’re ready to listen to you! Even better, we’re ready to co-listen with you!

Introductory classes for the next two Wednesday evenings, **June 17 and 24** from 6:30–8 p.m., are offered free of cost. Then will follow a third opportunity on **Wednesday, July 1**, from 6:30–9 p.m., to consider and possibly be invited to join the series that will conclude on September 30. The July 1 class will have a sliding-scale cost affordable for any budget. All classes meet in Room 122. For more information on co-listening, visit www.rc.org. RSVP to Thee Smith, 404-727-0636 or thee.smith@emory.edu.

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