

# COURIER-JOURNAL

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## Faith Today

### HEARING WITH THE HEART

By Father Herbert Weber  
NC News Service

Millie knew that the week following the funeral would be the best time for a visit to her newly widowed neighbor. Ever since she lost her husband five years earlier, she had realized that the hardest time came after things began to settle down.

The visit was pleasant. Arthur spent the time reminiscing, talking about his beloved Ellen. Millie simply listened with care. There were a few tears, but neither Arthur nor Millie was embarrassed by them.

The surprise came when Millie returned home. She had expected that after the brief visit she could go back to her other tasks. But that was not so easy to do.

Instead, upon entering her house, Millie sat down at the kitchen table, unwilling to do anything. She felt as if somehow she had been touched by something holy. She wanted to savor the moment.

She had known in advance that listening to her neighbor during his time of grief would help him. Her discovery, though, was that it also had a profound impact on her.

The warm glow Millie felt after that visit is shared by many after an act of kindness. What Millie was experiencing, however, was more than just a good, warm feeling. As a person engaged in the process of listening, her receptiveness was producing a change in her too.

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Everyone — at least once in a while — needs someone who will listen.

•In a counseling situation, all the members of one family said they wanted to be listened to more frequently by the others. The parents as well as the children were surprised to hear they did not listen enough.

•In many parishes, lonely men and women who have lots of time start calling the rectory, sometimes with very weak excuses or slight complaints, just to have someone listen and acknowledge their presence in the community.

•Busy family and career persons, who artfully balance many activities, admit that their effectiveness depends in part on having someone there to listen to them when their balancing act fails.

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The act of listening is a necessary ingredient for human and spiritual growth. Much like Shakespeare's "quality of mercy" that blesses both the giver and the receiver, listening bestows its benediction on those at both ends.

Learning to listen aids the ongoing conversion process of the man or woman who strives to be more Christlike. It creates a new view of self and the surrounding world. Listening, as an act of the heart, makes room for other people in one's life. The fears, joys or even the everyday experiences of someone else start to matter.

The listener begins to relate on other persons' terms and actually starts to hear the longings of their hearts. Listening becomes a bridge that provides a connection with other members of the human family.

This connection becomes a strong force in building human solidarity. And it can't help but transform the heart of the listener.

A young man in his first job after college expressed a weariness with the way he had spent years worrying about himself and his own life — from hopes for material success to anxiety over a healthy self-concept to fears about acceptance from peers. He felt all his interests had been turned inward.



The same man later confided that many of his earlier concerns diminished when he began to rechannel his energies — becoming aware of others and listening to them. He felt himself growing in relationships and having a new enthusiasm about his own uniqueness.

It is as if the human heart doesn't become fully itself until it is involved with someone else.

Listening is the vehicle through which this involvement is possible.

As someone grows in understanding and acceptance of others through listening, that person's own heart is changed. Conversion is taking place.

(Father Weber is a pastor and author in Bowling Green, Ohio.)

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Listening to others involves more than hearing spoken words, writes Father Herbert Weber. It is a function of the heart that enriches both speaker and listener.