

Holy Curiosity for the Other — A Missional Practice

Missional practices: cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ's mission.

Purpose: Deeply rooted in our enduring principle *Worth of All Persons* this practice helps us *begin* to embody the invitation to Christ's peace. This practice is about how we create safe and inviting space in meaningful conversation with others. By risking new and deeper relationships we meet people in the context of their lives and free them to express and even discover the essence of who they are and desire to become in the presence of the Spirit.

Note: Although this practice emphasizes risking new conversations with those we don't know well or at all, these steps are equally important in going deeper with those we think we know but have never really heard their story.

Process: As we approach others in meaningful conversation we create safe and inviting space by practicing the following steps:

Be Prayerful – Seek to be fully present with God and the other person. Ask for courage, patience, and insight to cultivate in yourself a *holy curiosity* that transcends your own needs for affirmation or expression and calls you into full attentiveness and discovery of another person's life and story. This is not a one-time prayer but a posture of prayerful awareness as we discover the essence of God in the other person.

Ask Genuine Questions – Out of genuine curiosity for the other we ask questions that gently lead to deeper sharing. Questions like, "We don't know one another very well, would you be willing to share a little about yourself?", "I would really like to get to know you better, where would be a good place to start?", or in response to a statement "That is interesting, can you share with me what has led you to this place?"

If you sense the relationship has evolved to a place of intimacy and openness you can begin to explore questions of faith. Questions/statements like, "As you shared I could not help but sense your choices (or decisions) seem grounded in something beyond yourself – has this been your experience? Can you share more?" or "Where or how did you find peace (or renewal) in the midst of that difficult time?" or "What is your source of inspiration?"

As you can see, when talking with persons we are getting to know or who have little "religious" background we can ask questions that uncover dimensions of their spiritual life without resorting to "religious" or doctrinal language. This is not a trick to work God into the conversation but comes from our genuine desire to explore all

dimensions of their story when we sense the time is right. Continue to be prayerful and open with your sole purpose to more deeply understand the essence of God in the other person.

Pause and Reflect – We tend to interpret another person’s story through the filters of our own experience. Reflection is about both *hearing and understanding* the other so they feel they have been *heard and understood*. When our curiosity is genuine and Spirit led we desire deeper understanding to ensure we are truly stepping inside their story and *experiencing* things from their perspective.

The best way to do this is to pause and reflect back with them from time to time what you believe you are hearing. Statements like, “So what I think I heard you share is . . .” or “I think you shared something significant – let me make sure I heard you correctly”. This is not about simply repeating back what we heard but processing it in the context of our life experience and then sharing it in our own words to test our understanding.

When the other person feels both heard and understand it frees them to continue to share more deeply and results in a deeper understanding between two people. Like asking good questions this takes practice and will result in deeper levels of conversation over time.

Affirm the Other – It is important to convey to the other person they have your total attention. Genuinely affirm what you hear by making direct eye contact, a nod, or following up with an affirmative statement (i.e. I understand or tell me more about that). These convey genuine interest and attention.

Follow the Spirit’s Lead – Entering into conversations of significance take us right to the heart of the gospel – relationships! We can depend on the Spirit’s guidance to help us balance how our personal sharing in a conversation can help lead a conversation deeper or limit the other person’s sharing. Sometimes a willingness to be vulnerable by sharing a thought or feeling that reveals something significant about our self creates a pathway for the other to follow. It is critical that we maintain prayerful self-awareness so the conversation does not become more about us than the other. Conversation is more art than science. As we risk new and deeper relationships our conversations will mature over time and we will become more skilled at cultivating conversations of significance.

Tips:

- Be patient. Remember we live in a transactional world and our conversations have also become that way in many respects. Having conversation for the sake of truly getting to know another person is rare and may even feel a bit unsettling at first.

Some conversations will go well and others not so well. Do not get discouraged. We are charting new path here that will lead to a new kind of community!

- Be prayerfully self-aware. Some of us have difficulty being fully present with another person. Every story or experience shared reminds us of a story we want to share. This particular practice is about developing a holy curiosity for another person so be aware of how much you are sharing your own story.
- Practice on those you know and you will be surprised what you learn! Seek their honest and constructive feedback.

The Spirit moves in our relationships in ways we do not fully comprehend. When we provide safe, inviting, and prayerful space for another to share, transformative encounters with God and one another occur over time. Trust in the Holy Spirit.