



By Pat Haggerty

I was chatting with someone recently and we were bemoaning the fact that true conversation and really listening are things of the past. As a society we are absorbed with technology: instant messaging, tweeting, snap chatting, etc. Much good can come from connecting with others through technology. However, we must not lose sight of personal contact through conversation. We can't let technology absorb us.

I would like to recommend a book that I have found extremely beneficial. It is *Turning to One Another: simple conversations to restore hope to the future* (Margaret Wheatley, Berrett-Koehler Publishers). In it Wheatley writes, "One of the easiest human acts is also the most healing. Listening to someone. Simply listening. Not advising or coaching, but silently and fully listening."

Wheatley encourages conversation to bring about hope. Right now our world needs a lot of hope. As individuals, we need to cling to hope so that we can bring about healing. We need to turn our darkness into light. We need to be good listeners, paying attention to those around us.

Being a good listener is one of the first steps toward good conversation. St. Benedict advised his brothers to "listen carefully. . .and incline the ear of your heart." We must bring our hearts

into the act, so to speak. Listening is one thing, but listening with the heart is yet another. It not only implies having empathy, but it also implies action. If we listen with our hearts, we will be inclined to action.

I should warn you that listening involves intensity. How often have we “pretended” to listen but our minds are really absent from the conversation? “There’s a lot of difference between listening and hearing,” says G.K. Chesterton.

Just as we want the Lord to listen to our prayers, there are those who want us to listen to them. We should reflect on the words of Psalm 102---“Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to thee! Do not hide thy face from me in the day of my distress! Incline thy ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call!”

Let us now listen to those in distress and answer their call.