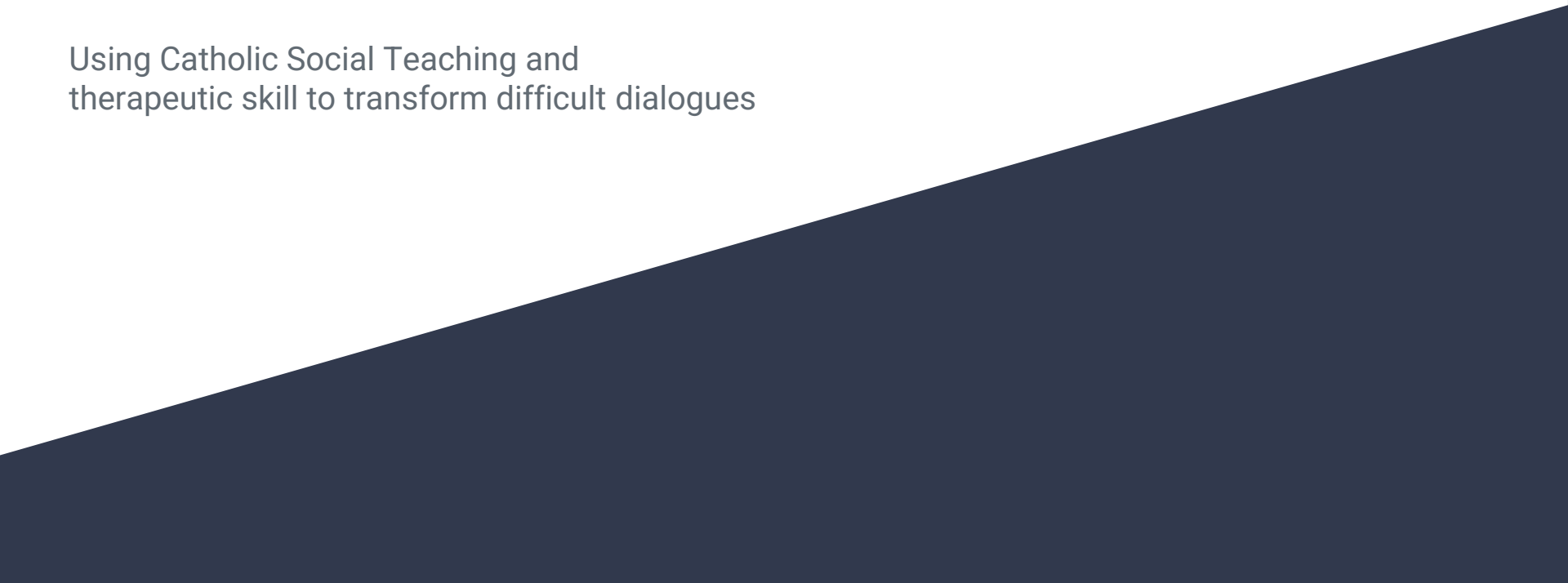


# Conversing with Grace:

Using Catholic Social Teaching and  
therapeutic skill to transform difficult dialogues



# Introductions



# Learning Objectives

- Describe Catholic Social Teachings on communion and the centrality of Christ
- Identify three science-based ways to foster healthy communication and connection despite disagreement
- Implement several practical strategies that can improve your response during difficult conversations

# Difficulties we face...

Gender dysphoria workshop

Supervisee shares impact of political decisions

Science as a “false god”

Supervisee names identity impacts

Sister’s disclosure

Principal voices frustration

Parents voicing concern about schools

College students afraid to speak

# Responding to disagreement and threats

(Brewer, 2000; Gaertner et al., 1999; Patterson et al., 2011; Riek et al., 2006)

Group together:

- Categorize - Who's with me?
- Identify and find safety with our group
- Distance ourselves from the outgroup
- Perceive and treat people differently based on group membership

Prepare to fight:

- Marshal facts, support our case
- Stop listening
- Ignore our blind spots
- Focus on "winning" over connection

# Responding to disagreement and threats

Protect our group and identity:

- Threats to our values provoke increases in bias toward outgroup members
- Unity or dialogue with the “other side” can threaten our belonging
- So we highlight our differences
- Minimize common ground
- We don’t listen for fear of appearing to agree or support the other side

# Soldier

vs.

# Scout

Eliminate the threat

Defend our own

Whatever it takes

Us vs. Them

Gather information

Find out the truth

Still identified with a cause

Who are they?

(Galef, 2021)

# We are called

As witnesses

As effective evangelists

As ethical clinicians

As caring companions

To acknowledge the differences:

- No relativism
- Difference is real and meaningful

To hold the tensions:

- Keep the faith AND pursue unity
- Identify truth AND value the other

To see our shared identities:

- Not sameness of belief
- All beloved by God
- Sharing a work or a mission



# Our guides

Professional codes and guidelines

Scientific and therapeutic wisdom

Catholic Social Teaching

# Catholic Social Teaching: Communion and the Centrality of Christ



# Catholic Social Teaching

“CST helps us to be Catholic the other six days of the week.”

CST Provides:

- Principles for reflection
- Criteria for judgment
- Directives for action

# Communion not Oppositionism



Pope Leo XIII

Leo XIII  
*Rerum Novarum* or  
“On Capital and Labor” 1891

Pius XI  
*Quadragesimo Anno* or  
“On Reconstruction of the Social Order” 1931

# Catholic Social Teaching

What does “Catholic” really mean?

“You unite together the inhabitants of the cities, the different peoples, nay the whole human race, by belief in our common origin, so that men are not satisfied in being joined together, but become in some sort brothers.”

St. Augustine *De moribus ecclesiae*

# Catholic Social Teaching

## **Matthew 18:15-20**

### **A Brother Who Sins**

“If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Matthew 18:17-18

# Catholic Social Teaching

## **Matthew 18:10-14**

### **Parable of the Lost Sheep**

“In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost.”

## **Matthew 18:15-20**

### **A Brother Who Sins**

## **Matthew 18: 21-35**

### **Parable of the Unforgiving Servant**

“I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.”

# Catholic Social Teaching

Christianity is not “an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”

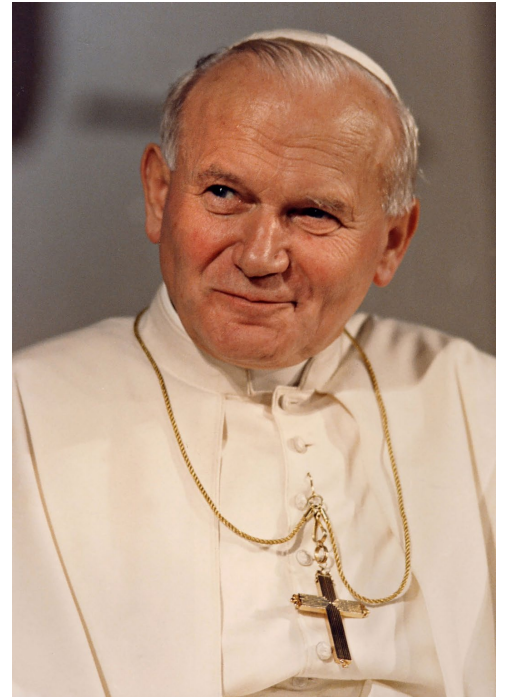
Pope Benedict XVI *Deus Caritas Est* n.1



# Grace Perfects Nature

The Church has the duty to proclaim the “freedom from everything that oppresses man, but especially freedom from sin and from the Evil One. ... Liberation which urges us by the power of charity to communion in which we find the summit and fullness of that communion in the Lord. Liberation which must overcome the various slaveries and idols that man forges for himself and makes the new man grow to his full stature.”

Pope St. John Paul II  
*Address at Puebla, Mexico*  
1979



# Professional and Scientific Guidance



# Professional Codes

(American Counseling Association, 2014; American Psychological Association, 2002)

- Respect for People's Rights and Dignity (APA)
  - ◆ Right to self-determination
  - ◆ Respect differences
  - ◆ Eliminate effects of biases
  
- Client Autonomy (ACA)
  - ◆ “Counselors are aware of—and avoid imposing—their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.”
  
- See the world from their point of view
- We do not have to agree with them, but we must be able to respect, empathize and help them towards their goals

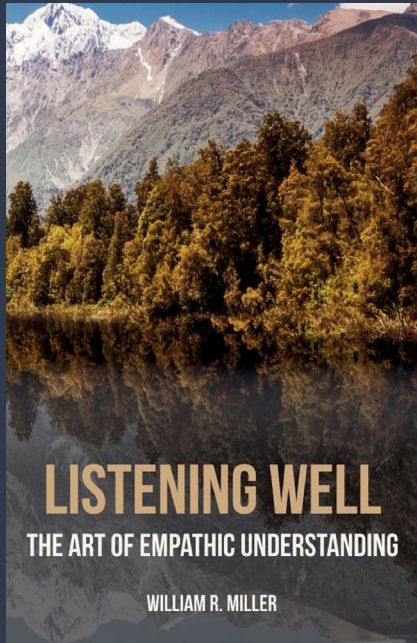
# Addressing Group Dynamics

(Brewer, 2000; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999; Gaertner et al., 1999, 2000)

- Superordinate goals
- Superordinate identity
- Individuate out-group members
- Perspective taking
- Constructive cross-cultural contact

# Listening Well –

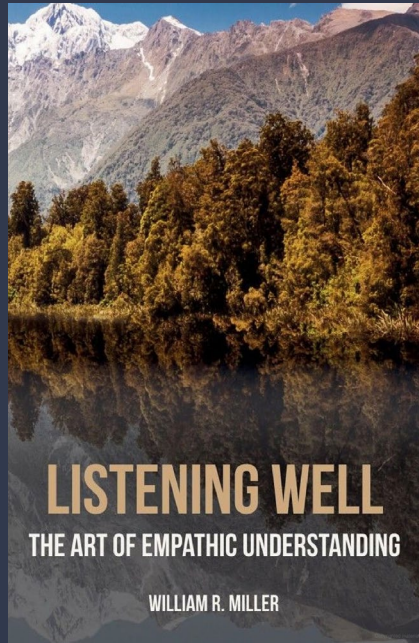
A key to conversing  
with grace



Listening well in conflict:

- Goal is to understand, not to make a point or change an opinion
- Full, undivided, curious attention to understanding the others experience.
- Reflecting what you think they mean as accurately as possible
- Listening does not imply agreement or acceptance of what you hear

# Listening Well – Roadblocks



- Directing
- Moralizing - stating shoulds
- Persuading
- Judging
- Disagreeing
- Agreeing
- Warning
- Advising
- Analyzing

# Practical Steps

First, a story...

# Practical Steps

Based in ACT as a values-based flexible model for behavior change.

(Hayes et al., 2012)

- Stop and check in: Recognize your reaction
- Attend to emotion: How is it influencing you?
- Notice thinking: What story is building in your mind?
- Recenter in your values: What is your call as a Catholic? Who do you want to be?
- Commit to a course: Even if its uncomfortable, or requires holding tensions



Grace to transform our nature



# Beyond the natural

Grace enables real transformation

- Strength to hold the tensions
- Wisdom to see how God sees

Keeping Christ at the center

- Means we don't easily fit in group splits
- Means willingness to die for those we disagree with
- May look very different than our natural responses

# Reflection exercise and discussion



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