



ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

Website: elephantsinthelivingroom.com

Engaging Impasse: Circles of Contemplation and Dialogue



NANCY SYLVESTER, IHM
OUR LADY OF FATIMA
OAK PARK, MI
FEBRUARY 9, 2012

Introduction

Monica Stuhlreyer, IHM

I see that the people gathered tonight are indeed the Church of Detroit, right? And many of my old friends, right? I suggested that we get Nancy. I'm on the board now and I'm on the education committee for the Elephants, and I suggested that we have Nancy come, because she is involved in a work that she has been at since 2002, which is the Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue; and its major project is called *Engaging Impasse: Circles of Contemplation and Dialogue*. If there is anything we're concerned with, and that we talk about constantly at these meetings, are the impasses in the Church, right? So I thought, maybe, she might have something to share with us, shed some light on our concerns, and what we can do about them. But just a little bit of background about Nancy. She is an IHM sister. I lived with her for three years, way back after she graduated from St. Louis University, majoring in Philosophy and Political Science; then she got her graduate degree from St. Mary's in Winona, Minnesota in Human Development, with a concentration in Economics and Theology. So she has a nice background in education.

After she taught in secondary education for a while, she served on the staff at Network - you know, that National Catholic Social Justice Lobby in Washington - from 1977 to '92, first as a researcher and lobbyist, and then she was actually the National Coordinator from '82 to '92, and a board member. So after that she got elected as the Vice President of our congregation, the Sister Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and while doing that, she also became the President of the Leadership Council for Women Religious, which she finished her term in 2001. So, in 2002, she founded what we said is, *The Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue* in response to working for justice and right relationships in church and society, all of her experiences that she had had in the past.

She serves now as the President of the Institute, and as the Executive Director of the major project, which is: *Engaging Impasse: Circles of Contemplation and Dialogue*. I was privileged to be able to be part of one of those workshops. She'll tell you more about that, I'm sure. But it was like over a whole year, three times we gathered over three or four days at a time, and dealt with our own impasse experiences. She's also co-editor of a book: *Crucible for Change: Engaging Impasse through Communal Contemplation and Dialogue*.

So Nancy brings to this project her commitment to dialogue and collaborative work, and a collaborative work style, and her belief that the impasse being experienced currently in the work of transformation of church and society requires a contemplative response. So I could go on and on about all of her other background, but I will turn it over to her and let her do that. So thank you. (Applause)

Transformation in a Time of Impasse

Nancy Sylvester, IHM

Thank you for the lovely introduction. I feel like a jack of all trades. I am probably a jack of all trades and master of none; so that is why I can speak about a lot of things, because of the experiences that I have had. And so when Monica asked me, she said, "Why don't you come to the Elephants and tell them a little about your work?" And at first I thought, "Well I don't think an infomercial for 30 or 35 minutes would be very interesting to anyone." So I put together a presentation that I hope will give a larger context for why I believe we are where we are now as a society, but more importantly, as the Church, and why the

call perhaps today is to look at things in a new way; and one way is from the perspective of contemplation and dialogue. Hopefully it'll be something that you may resonant with and provide a context for my work that I'll explain toward the end. But I hope it will be an opportunity to confirm what you already know, and maybe, give you a new way of looking at some of the things that are currently going on now, and why we have to find another way of addressing the issues that are facing us. So with that let's begin.

First, I have a little inventory for you or a little questionnaire. You can do it mentally, or if you want to you can jot down your responses to these questions:

1. Did you ever believe in Santa Claus? And do you believe in Santa Claus now? (You don't have to answer out loud [Laughter] because we probably will have different answers and I don't want to embarrass anyone who still believes in that dear man coming down the chimney.)
2. Did you ever believe that God was a man living in Heaven? And do you believe that now?
3. Did you ever believe that Heaven was a place that existed above us? And do you believe that now?
4. Did you ever believe that God created the universe in seven days? And do you believe it now?
5. Did you ever believe that you had to be a member in good standing of the Roman Catholic Church to be saved? And do you believe that now?
6. Did you ever believe that you would only be saved, provided that you follow the specific rules and believe specific dogmas? And do you believe that now?
7. Did you ever believe that the U. S. was the best country, and always operated out of its highest good? And do you believe it now?
8. And did you ever believe that white persons were better than people of color; or men were superior to women? And do you believe that now?

Well, I suspect we may have answered some of those questions differently, but that actually, no one in this room continues to believe the same things that they probably believed once in their life; that we are also all in a process of development. We have all evolved in different ways, and sometimes differently, in different aspects of our life. But what we know is that change is what is inevitable. We all change. We evolve over time. Our bodies change, as many of us know, every time we look in the mirror. Our emotions change; our spirituality changes; and our consciousness changes.

I want to begin here, because, for me, when I reflect on the polarities we are experiencing today, both in our society and in our Church, I believe it's connected to the various stages of development that we are at in our lives and how we find ourselves in conflict with those who are at different levels of consciousness, which can also be articulated as different world views. There are many different ways of approaching this, but I thought the stages of development would serve us best as I believe many of us have had similar experiences living in the Detroit archdiocese.

How many of you lived in Detroit during the Second Vatican Council and its aftermath? Would you just raise your hands? I grant the vast majority of us. And although other dioceses might have been good, Detroit was special at that time. We have had some common experiences that have really asked us to evolve in certain ways. And we can't let go of it, because our location is important, and our experiences are important. I thought t we can draw on those common experiences tonight. I believe that many of us are trying to articulate our faith out of a consciousness which has evolved from the experiences and insights of these last 50 to 60 years and we are now experiencing increasing resistance from the official Church, which has been our home, and whose vision we actually followed in the '60s. And I believe this tension for us can become so great that it might be called impasse.

And here I draw on the work of Constance FitzGerald, who's a cloistered Carmelite out of Baltimore. She wrote a very seminal article around 1983-1984 called *Impasse and Dark Night* in which she likened the societal situation we are living in to the journey of John of the Cross and the Dark Night of the Soul. And she said that we are really living in a time of impasse. That inspired me as I was praying and getting ready in 2000 for my presidential address to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and then in the work that I am doing today. One can describe impasse as a breakdown in communication; an inability to right a situation despite good and well intentioned efforts; a dwindling of hope; the rise of disillusionment and obsession with the problem; and a no way out situation.

Now think about some of the issues before us today:

1. The new translation of the Roman Missal.
2. Women's ordination.
3. The acceptance of Gay and Lesbian marriage.
4. Adoption by Gay and Lesbian couples.
5. A woman's capacity for moral decision making, especially regarding her body.
6. Married priests.
7. More democratic governance of parishes and dioceses.
8. And the list goes on....

Now get in touch with your feelings even as I read those. Do you think to yourself, "Oh, I have tried so hard; I've knocked on those doors; I haven't gotten any kind of response. I'm so right! How can they not think that?" Do you get angry when you hear:

- Can gay and lesbian people adopt children?
- The whole controversy, right now, about contraception.
- Anything that is happening that you might feel your blood boil a bit.

If you answered yes to any of that then maybe, maybe, you may be experiencing impasse. And I suggest that the experience of impasse is also an opportunity. It invites those of us on the spiritual quest, and who continue our own inner work; and, I believe, that you all fit that category or you wouldn't be here. You wouldn't continue to come to the Elephants, if you weren't doing some inner work, believing that the quest for God is still the journey that we are all on. And to engage that experience of impasse, through the process of contemplation, personal and communal, is an opportunity to look at things in a new way; because, I think, doing so invites a transformation to another level of consciousness, which breaks open our imagination to envision new ways of being and doing. The old ways do not work. As Einstein so marvelously stated, "We cannot solve the problems of today with the same consciousness that created them." And we are doing our best to try to do that, and we can't. I believe embracing contemplation opens us up to understand our faith, more in alignment with our current level of consciousness, and to invite us even to go deeper, and continue our evolutionary journey.

So, I'd like to illustrate what I just said through the experiences, the lenses of my life, which, I believe, you will resonate with, except for the younger ones among us. So, I am curious to see how some of this relates, and to see how your own progression has developed over the years. And then, at the end, we will have a break, then have time for some questions, responses, after which the business meeting will occur.

The lens I chose tonight is that of the evolutionary development of human consciousness. You can approach this from many different ways. But, when I thought about this group, and being a faith community, I thought this is the lens I wanted to use. Over the past decades a good amount of literature has been written about the evolutionary development of human consciousness. It's like other development psychological theories--we all have to go through all the phases. And we all go through the phases at different times, and sometimes we go through at different times in different aspects of our lives. Think about how easy it is in a sense to compartmentalize. You may know a very good business person, and yet, you meet h/her on Sunday and they are still thinking that, maybe, heaven is a place situated somewhere above them. You know, we are very complicated persons. And so, if we continue to develop, we may develop differently, in different parts of our lives.

More recent studies address this same reality in terms of tribes, and societies, and institutions within which we live. So we may be at one stage of development, as an individual, yet living in an institution, or a society that's predominately at another level of development, one that's either more complex or one that is less so. And that too creates its own conflict. Sometimes it's harmonious, and sometimes it isn't.

Now some of the thinkers and writers in this area are Ken Wilber - that some of you may recognize; Don Beck, who wrote *Spiral Dynamics*. And you have the mystics: Theresa of Avila and John of the Cross - they wrote of developmental stages of the mystical consciousness. James Marion is another person who offers these stages of development with emphasis on faith or religious development. And I have chosen

to go with Jim's categories tonight, because, even though one can approach this from the societal framework, I wanted to come at it from the faith perspective, which will also touch on society. But I wanted to use his categories; and he's an interesting fellow. I don't know him personally, but he is a colleague of Ken Wilber. He's a former Catholic seminarian. He was a student of Divinity in an interdenominational seminary, a lawyer and a public policy analyst with members of Congress. So I guess that hint of Washington in there made him attractive to me. I thought, "Well, okay, let's see what he has to say." And it gave me a nice framework to build this talk on.

One other issue though, I want you to think of these stages of development like a spiral. This helps me a lot, and maybe it will help you imagine a spiral and how it begins to make its turn it goes up and out. It enters a new trajectory and although it spirals back it doesn't go back around in the same place. Rather it goes back through but from a different angle. I'd suggest that describes what happens as we develop our consciousness. As I develop my consciousness I may begin a new turn of the spiral, but I return to an earlier stage and often pick up something that I left behind, that really was good in an earlier time, maybe something that I forgot that I now reinterpret through the new lens; and then I go back, and up, and around again. So if that image helps you, keep it. What is most important is that you start to see where you are in the developmental stages of evolutionary consciousness.

So let me begin with my story, and hopefully, you'll start seeing your own story in some of mine. You may even be seeing more, so if your mind drifts off, go ahead, think about your own journey of transformation and hopefully you'll come back to what I'm saying at some point.

I grew up on the south side of Chicago. I was born in 1948, so this was the 50s. Any of you who know Chicago, knows it is a very Catholic city, and I was a very pious child. I had every missal: the Marian Missal, the St. Joseph Missal, the St. Andrew Missal - there were others. I know I had every rosary: 15 decade rosary, with every imaginable kind of bead: the seeds from Jerusalem, the shiny beads, the unbreakable beads, (although I was able to break those.). I went to every novena and every mission at our parish. I had holy cards, holy cards up the gazoo. I remember once when I was sick, I decided to organize them. I made little envelopes with papers. I remember stapling them and then I put the Holy Cards into categories. I had separated all the Marys, all the Infant of Pragues, all the Sacred Hearts, and then within each of those categories, I divided them between the shiny and the plain. (Laughter) So, obsessive? Yes! So when we would go to Mass in the morning - and we went to daily Mass - the girls would use these - like boys used baseball cards -we would say, "Would you give me two plain Jesus' for one Mary that was shiny?" Clearly, I was a Catholic girl that doesn't exist anymore; but that was my life. It was a God and me piety. I'd ask God to intervene. If I was good, God would make it happen and if I was bad, probably not.

I was very obedient - very obedient - such that at my First Communion I had a cough. This happened at a time when nothing could pass between your lips between midnight and the time of receiving Communion. And here I was with a cough. My Aunt lived with us and she was like my second mother and quite wise. She said "Honey, take some cough medicine; its fine; it's okay." So I took it, got dressed up, and went over to church. Now, we had to go to the school room first, and, of course, having my Aunt reassure me that taking that medicine was okay wasn't enough. I had to tell the sister. And she said, "Oh, you have to talk to the Monsignor." (Laughter) She wasn't like my aunt, who said, "Oh, honey, it's all right. God won't ..." " Oh, no! no! So there I went this little seven year old girl in her white dress going over knocking, ringing the bell saying, "Monsignor, I had this little cough medicine ..." Luckily, he was wiser and said, "Oh, it's fine." However, the point: I needed the official external authority to give me permission. I was very obedient, and even my aunt couldn't give me that kind of permission.

We also adopted pagan babies, You certainly gave a lot of money for them because you knew that if you didn't have them baptized and named they wouldn't be saved. We knew there were Protestants and they weren't as good as Catholics; and for heaven's sake, if one of your parents was a Protestant you were in trouble. Notice the word: Protestant. I didn't know there were Methodists, Episcopalians or Baptists; they were all Protestants.

I suspect many of you can identify with what I've been saying. The stage of development that I was operating out of is what Marion calls the "mythic" level of consciousness in our faith development. It is a

stage that is very appropriate as a child. At this stage God is up there, externalized, outside of one's self, able to work miracles to meet my needs. My world and what I am taught is both true and the best. I try to shape who I am based on the conventional laws and roles - my experience with my First Communion is a perfect example. My self-worth is in following those laws and behaving appropriately. My world is quite parochial; and I'm somewhat, if not more than apprehensive, of that which is different or "other". Now does that sound familiar to you?

I suspect, in different ways, we have all experienced that stage of development, and in some cases, in a more subtle way, continue to experience it today. So I'm saying things, in a fun way, to make some points, but to realize those beliefs, values, attitudes go very deep in us, and take on other forms and expressions. Marion writes that this mythic level of consciousness has been the dominant level for all of the major religions, including Christianity and it continues to be the faith consciousness for many adults.

But what happens when it gets played out at the adult level? Besides still believing in some of the ways I just mentioned, there is a continued desire to convert others to the true religion. There is even a desire to have governments enact laws that agree with what the believer has been taught about morality, so as to secure one's own righteousness. I think you can hear within the rhetoric of the Republican debates that consciousness emerging in some of the more traditional and conservative candidates. Think about the attitude toward Mormons: it's not a religion, it's a cult; and there's a suspicion: it's not good enough; it's not okay.

We experience this on many of the moral issues facing us. There is a desire for the government to enact laws that represent what we believe. There is the belief that somehow, what we have is best for all; and that's part of that consciousness. At this level others are seen as a threat to one's sense of worth and other religions as really more like -isms; and that somehow, they are not quite as good, and will not be saved, using that language. In more extreme cases people at this stage will want to use the police powers of the state to impose one's belief system on others. In more fundamentalist tribal cultures, which are operating predominately out of this stage of consciousness, there is the belief that the religious law should dominate; if you don't obey it, you should be punished for it. A good example of that are the countries that espouse Sharia law.

Now remember for centuries religious law did shape the political and legal systems. It was only with the advent of pluralistic democracies that we began the separation of church and state embodying a new stage of consciousness.

However, even in democracies there can be a reversal. I just read in the *Christian Science Monitor* not too many weeks ago, that Hungary has undergone an incredible shift in their constitution that, even in the face of opposition from the people, the ruling party has rewritten their constitution to eliminate some of the principles of their democratic heritage. They have put in their preamble recognition of the role of Christianity in preserving the nation. This has led to increased attacks on gypsies and other minorities. Other key tenets were included that violate many of the rules of a modern constitution. Democracy is not that old. Democracy is only 200 or 300 years old. So when major change like what is occurring now threatens one's identity there is increased anxiety. Fear is powerful and people begin to look for absolutes and order, even willing to give up other freedoms they have been experiencing. But that is another talk.

When someone remains at this level, it is very difficult to think globally. We wonder, ponder sometimes: "Why don't people get global climate change?" Because you can't think about global climate change if you don't see it connected to who you are, to your family, to what's personal, because that is where your interests and concerns are. It is difficult to have people be thinking about larger issues, to think globally, if they are coming out of a mythic consciousness. This extends beyond one's faith into our wider world of economics and our politics. Think about the institution like the U. N. Do you remember seeing signs in Indiana that would say, "U. S. Out of the U. N."? There is fear that nations other than our own would tell us what to do.

I don't know if you heard Rick Santorum when he was talking about Hilary Clinton's *It Takes a Village*, and he said, "No, it takes a family." Certainly it takes a family. But do you see what is operating here? It's my

family that can take care of it. It is those whom I know and with whom I identify. I'm not stretching to see how my interest can intersect with a more diverse community.

Returning to my story, I have to say, I was operating out of the mythic level of consciousness in 1966.

So let's just go back for a minute and move through this a little more quickly. I think I get a little carried away sometimes when I'm talking; so I'll try to be more to the point.

What I believe happened in the Second Vatican Council is that the Church, as an institution, began to take a turn on the spiral out of the "mythic" consciousness to the next level, which Marion would call the "rational" consciousness. Throughout history, individuals within the Church have operated out of that rational consciousness because individuals can be growing and moving in very different ways than the society or institution within which they live. What I am suggesting is that the church as institution began to make that next turn of the spiral at this time. Those of us who were ready began an incredible journey in our life. And it helped for those of operating out of the mythic consciousness that the Vatican told us to change. Remember at that stage external authority is key. I always say that I entered the IHMs in 1966 as that pious child and I changed 180° because I did what Rome told us to do when they asked women religious to return to the spirit of their founder and renew. I was ready to wear a habit, live in big convents forever. I'd be happy. But because we were told to do it, we did it. And that helped those of us, coming out of the mythic consciousness to make the shift.

Think about the key documents of the Council. *Gaudium et Spes*. No longer was the Church apart from the world; now it was to be in its midst feeling the joys and hopes of all of God's people. *Lumen Gentium*, the documents on divine revelation, liturgy, and freedom of conscience, all offered us a new perspective on how to see our faith and how to see our world. For me the insights of those documents got filtered down through my formation in the IHMs. I was in Monroe for the three years ('66 to '69) and we had excellent theology. It was a gift. So let me just quickly go through, and see if you can't feel, in yourself what was happening to me who operating out of a mythic level of consciousness began to experience a very different reality.

Scripture

We started to see that revelation was ongoing. The scriptures were not literal. They were written in an historical context. Now for me, who only knew the bible from my family, and we had lovely pictures in the middle of it - colored pictures - and you could write in who died and who was born-- that was about all I knew. You know, we didn't read scripture, really. So, this is a true story. In the first scripture class we were learning about the Old Testament. We learned that maybe, just maybe, Noah's ark may not have existed. After class I came back to the postulate, and there was a letter from my mother with a clipping from the *New World* - that was the Archdiocesan paper - saying that they thought they had just found a piece of the ark. (Laughter) To me that illustrates the whole thing that was happening: no ark - ark; no ark - ark. It was an invitation to see things so differently; and doing it, luckily for me, in a very great atmosphere in terms of a secure place to do it. Not too much later many of us began to study Liberation Theology. If you were in Detroit in those years, you might remember we used to bring in the Liberation theologians? We had conferences with Gutierrez and other liberation theologians. I helped to facilitate those meetings. Later we realized all theology is contextual and we read and studied Feminist Theology, Black Theology, Womanist Theology, Mujerista Theology, and today Asian Theology.

Process Philosophy

I wanted to be a nun, because I loved God and I wanted to be perfect. So imagine my surprise to find that change is probably the only thing we can rely on and that everything is changing. Even God changes in process philosophy. Of course this is also what we are learning in quantum physics today: that every time we connect, we are changing each other. We are going to be different leaving today, whether you agree with me or not, because we've interacted with each other. We're changed, because we lived in the Archdiocese of Detroit during an incredible moment in history.

Sacramental Theology

Remember the writings of Bernard Cooke: there were seven sacraments, and then there were sacraments, the sacraments of life. We saw the importance of celebrating life's critical passages in new

ways. Today, what we are learning through the work of Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry about the origins of our Universe, deepen the reverence for Earth and for the stuff of life that was seeded with this new sacramental theology.

Liturgical Reform

Was it not exhilarating? We used to come together in homes. We shared homilies. We shared the words of consecration. We broke the bread. We experienced the priesthood of believers. The ritualistic forms no longer spoke to us and they were no longer needed.

Ecumenism

I remember we had a course in Ecumenism and I visited for the first time churches of other religions. I began to speak of Methodist and Episcopalian and Presbyterian rather than Protestant. And I recall here in Detroit we had a great emphasis on Catholic-Lutheran dialogue. Do some of you remember that? I remember going downtown and being part of some major conferences in the late '60s or early '70s.

Well, you probably figured out what was happening to someone with a mythic consciousness: things began to fall apart. I was invited to expand at every level. Catholicism was no longer the only "one true religion." God was not male and in the sky. Scripture and dogma were not literal and unchanging. All formulations are conditioned by the historical period in which they were articulated. Change was essential to life and multiple perspectives were valid. And again, for me, and I think for any of us, what was important was that it was integrated into our prayer life. This wasn't just an intellectual journey. You had to get it in your heart; you had to make that shift. You had to at one point say, "I lost my faith." This happened to me during a very significant retreat in the early '70's. When after struggling with a kind of desolation I "heard"... you have lost your faith but it was the faith of your fathers. You have the gift of faith but the name of God will always be changing. That experience has stayed with me forever. I had to give up the faith of my fathers. I had to give up that which I thought was going to hold me forever, because something had shifted, and my consciousness has changed.

But I had a loving community, a community to explore these changes together. It was a faith community that supported me in that struggle. We supported each other. When that mythic articulation of our faith shifted, we had to find new anchors in our faith tradition. For me and for many of us I believe we found meaning and hope in the Catholic Social Justice Tradition. Most of us didn't learn that in grade school or high school and yet it embodied the values and principles which, I believe, have been the gift of modernity to us, especially as articulated in *Pacem in Terris*, where the economic, political, social and religious rights of all human beings are articulated - very comparable to the *U. N. Declaration of Human Rights*. And so we began to talk about justice as the other side of the coin with charity. Many of us began to act on behalf of justice as we began the next turn of the spiral. We got involved with the social movements of the time.

Let me just for a moment go back to my own story. I took my initial commitment of vows in 1969, and then went to St. Louis University, finished my B. A. in Philosophy and Political Science. Well, it was the Vietnam War. I became a draft counselor. I felt I just had to do that. It was the time of the Cambodian invasion and the killing of protestors at Kent State in Ohio. For three weeks we boycotted classes. We could have lost all of our credits, but I knew I had to do that. We were actually successful in getting the ROTC off campus which was the focus of our boycott. What did I learn from that? What this taught me was, that being loyal no longer demanded blind obedience; but rather you could dissent and still belong. You know, in those days, you would hear, "Well, why do you still live in the United States? If you don't like it get out." Today, we may hear why do you stay in the Church? But, you see probably those of us who are still trying to live Vatican II today know you can dissent and still belong; that authority, in and of itself, is not always right; and that you have an obligation to speak out, and to offer another point of view to be considered.

So, just take a moment, and think about your own life, and your own story. When did you realize that authority wasn't always right? Or, that you could dissent and still belong, which is such a critical value for us. Just take a moment and think about that. (Pause)

The Civil Rights Movement

Some of you may remember the Racism for Change workshops we held in this archdiocese in the 70's: Tom Hinsberg and Ron Terry led them but I was one of the process facilitators. That's when I became aware of white privilege and the blinders we wear, which keep us from seeing the beauty and the worth of the other.

The Women's Movement

Now for some, this was an area to study. For me, it was a radical change of place in terms of how I view the world. Women were equal to men and I realized how patriarchy and misogyny have misformed our conscience and our consciousness in every culture and in every religion.

So, again, take a minute, and just recall what was your experience that made you aware of the underside of history, and that women and persons of color had been systematically excluded, and that legal, political, economic and religious structures were created to maintain that exclusion. Just think for a minute: when did that happen for you? (Pause)

And many of us brought our faith to bear on the political agenda. Not that it has to be one certain way but we felt we could have a voice in shaping public policy issues. In the 70's and 80's Central American concerns were big and we had a great Central America task force here in the diocese. For others it was disarmament, or budget priorities, or health care. For me, I went to Washington, DC for 15 years with NETWORK, a Catholic social justice lobby, to try to bring to the political arena some of the values and the principles of our Catholic social justice tradition to influence the formation of policy. Democracy was becoming more a part of our lives. Those of us who were here in the mid-'70's might remember the preparation before the Call to Action conference: Every parish was involved in participatory modes of decision making raising up what we saw as concerns for the Church. And we really began to make suggestions for the future of the Church.

What did I learn? What did we learn perhaps? Well, we were becoming self-authoring selves, a phrase Robert Kegan from Harvard uses. When we are self-authoring we legitimate our own experience as a locus of authority. We respect external authority, but not blindly or without a critique; and we know that our experience has something to offer to the deliberations at hand.

The theology of Vatican II, I believe, opened us up to experiencing life in new ways. Our experiences of equality, diversity, democracy, justice began to give expression to our faith. We began already to live out of that next level of consciousness, which Marion calls the "rational". This is considered the dominant level in most Western countries right now - and actually, the level attained by the average adult. Of course, all of us here are above average, so we haven't stopped at this level. The rational consciousness is characterized by the ability to think abstractly, analyze, and critique the conventional laws; the capacity to imagine different worlds with different values. It brings our consciousness to that of the true universal. We're more tolerant, less judgmental, more compassionate, more inclusive - all the things we like to hear about ourselves - less fearful, less aggressive and more universally loving. Now I think most of us can resonate with most of those descriptions of the rational consciousness; and yet, there is still some of the mythic still in us; and in different places, it comes out in different ways. And I believe we try to struggle and make sense of it all, even if we continue to evolve into the next level of consciousness.

I would offer that we find ourselves at an impasse, especially within the Church, because we are trying to live out of that more complex level of consciousness, especially in our faith. We want to express it in ways that the current institutional Church is not seemingly accepting, wanting, or desiring. I believe, the institutional Church which began the next turn of the spiral with Vatican II reversed itself and is choosing to live out of the earlier mythic stage of consciousness.

I experienced that in a visceral way when I was the President of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

Part of being on the Presidency was to visit Rome every year to share with the appropriate congregations what was going on in the U. S. Church in terms of women and male religious. We would go with our male

counterparts. Going to the congregations, especially the one that deals with religious life, was so difficult. We tried so hard to try to engage in some conversation; I don't want to say dialogue, because I don't think we ever got to that level. I don't mean that critically, but the issues we dealt with only highlighted how different our world views were and at what different level of consciousness we were operating out of. The issues included New Ways Ministry. You might remember the Jeannine Gramick and Bob Nugent controversy. Should they work in that ministry, because there was such controversy about working with gay and lesbians? Then, there was the whole thing with Christine Vladimiroff, OSB, who was asked to silence Joan Chittister and tell her not to speak at the world wide Women's Ordination Conference in Dublin.

And then, what was probably most painful - they were all painful - since we came with our male counterparts who were both ordained priests and brothers was the question of mixed communities. That means any congregation of men who have as members both priests and brothers. By church law brothers cannot hold any positions of authority in those congregations; and so for years, the men came trying to say, "We want to raise up this question. We believe our brothers could be in positions of authority and serve as our superiors." And this time, one of the members of the sacred congregation turning almost red vehemently said: "Would you want to take orders from a brother?" And there were brothers in the room, and there were ordained friars and the friars said "Yes, we would." What this was an example of is the competing beliefs that authority and power come only from ordination, not from baptism. You saw it so lived out there. You thought, "Oh my heavens, if even males, who are brothers, are not seen as legitimate candidates for ecclesial authority, can you imagine even thinking about women in those positions." I saw so clearly that we were approaching these issues from very different levels of consciousness.

I also experienced something was going wrong in the political arena. By the time I was leaving Washington, I was aware that those of us representing the faith community were trying so hard to be accepted by the D. C. pragmatists, that, we lost, sometimes, the vision of why we were there. We were operating out of a very rational consciousness and forgot to speak to the heart. Sometimes the greater good for which we were working got forgotten in the discussion about whose bill or amendment it was or what the foundation who was funding the effort felt about it.

That kind of not crossing the aisle to see what could emerge from diverse viewpoints became even more pronounced when Newt Gingrich becomes Speaker of the House in 1994. The polarization we experience today began then. In that election, the majority of Catholics voted for Gingrich Republicans. I was already out of Washington, but I remember thinking when I woke up the morning after the election and hearing the results I thought people like me, have been working 20 to 25 years trying to teach people about the injustices facing us. We offered statistics and facts that were so clear. So what went wrong? And part of it is, I think, we weren't touching into the faith piece. We weren't seeing how the "rational" consciousness needed to be informed by our faith articulated anew at this stage of the spiral.

Since the 1980s my own spiritual practice has been more in terms of a contemplative approach. When it came to preparing the Presidential address in 2000, I found myself saying before the 1,000 elected leaders that I believe that women religious are facing an impasse with some of the Vatican officials and that all the ways we know how to respond are not working. I felt that we are being called to engage in contemplation so that we can imagine new ways of responding and acting.

I believe the issues facing us both in the Church and in our society, cannot be resolved by debating. They will not be resolved by us going to our corners, because the issues are too great and too complex. The new possibilities are inviting us to go beyond the 'rational' stage of consciousness to the next stage of "vision logic", where you are able to see how things are connected and work for holistic solutions. Think about it. We can't do global climate change alone. No one country can. No one city can. We have to do it in a coordinated way with all nations involved. You look at the poverty rates throughout the globe. We can't address that through looking only at the US economy. Unfettered market capitalism - bless Rush Limbaugh, who thinks it's terrific - is not going to take us into the future; it's destroying us. How can we talk about these kinds of things together?

I said to myself "Well, if I say this out loud in front of all of these women, then maybe I better do something about it." And so that's when I started the *Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue*, believing,

that if we could engage these impasses, these moments of powerlessness, from a communal contemplative perspective we could awaken our imaginations to be and act in new ways.

And so the process of Engaging Impasse: Circles of Contemplation and Dialogue® is designed to face directly our powerlessness; and that is not easy. Most of us following Vatican II experienced things changing in ways that gave us life. The US Bishops wrote a peace pastoral and an economic pastoral. We had great priests—many in this room-- things that we thought were important, were happening! Now, it's not! And that's a new experience for many of us.

And so what this process tries to do is to look at this experience of impasse at many levels, but especially the emotional, because we fail to remember that that's a critical part of who we are. We try to get to the why we feel a certain way and to understand our fears. We do this through a deeply contemplative process so as to imagine new ways of responding. There is no one answer. It's just knowing that our usual ways don't work any more

We are called then to keep trying to understand, to be active and as passionate, as we can but in new ways, so we don't tear ourselves apart. It is not worth it to keep getting extremely angry or upset. Why emit all that negative energy? We are learning more and more about energy and our energy fields, but that's another whole topic. But negative energy is not healthy for us. It's not healthy! So, for ourselves, we should do it, and then for the greater good of the Church, and then for the greater good of the planet. How can we begin together to explore different options?

Follow-up Programs

And so that's describes a bit of what the engaging impasse process tries to do; and as Monica mentioned, the original design was a lengthy process. Because of people's limitation of time and money I have designed this process for six days—either all together or in two week-ends separated by a few months. we will be offering the Circle in Cleveland July 16-22, and then in Aston, Pennsylvania November 11-17. So I invite you to consider participating in it.

As the Institute enters its second decade we have developed a program called *Transformation in a Time of Uncertainty* and it's a 9:00 to 4:00 one day program. The day is a type of introduction to the engaging impasse processes. It's looking at the time we are living through a systems approach. Then there is a teaching on contemplation, and how to listen and speak from a contemplative heart. We have also designed a follow-up process for those who want to continue a reflection on transformation, impasse and contemplation through the use of conference calls and the web site. I am doing that program in Adrian, MI at the Weber Center on April 29. You can get more information by contacting the Institute at iccdinstitute@aol.com. It's in the brochure as well. Some of you might be interested in coming down, or maybe that is something we might like to do here. It is a full day and I know your regular meetings are for a shorter period of time. It's hard to do some of these things in shorter amounts of time. I often get asked, "Well, come and do this; but can you do it in two hours?" And I think, "But if we are going to do this in a different way, and engage in some communal contemplative time, we've got to give a little bit more time to it."

The other thing that we are doing, is that we are exploring the theme of Exercising Contemplative Power; a bit of an oxymoron, perhaps, but many of us who have done the circles are activists; and it's difficult because this changes you. If you already practice contemplation you realize you begin to change. The old ways of behaving don't fit anymore. So you wonder: How do you express passion? How do you effect change? What do you do?

So we are exploring exercising contemplative power around the issues of the Middle East, the current political climate, economic disparity, global climate change, and the church. These reflections will shape a convening that we are going to have in October of 2012, in hopes of a larger one in October of 2013, where we will gather people who have been on a similar journey and are interested in coming together and explore, "Okay how do we start to live out of this new consciousness?" How do we manifest this in our everyday life, because we've got some great examples?" Tom Lumpkin is a great example; I'm sure there are others of whom I'm not aware. But how do the rest of us, how do we start to live out of a contemplative way, and continue to engage our everyday life? So I invite you to take a brochure. I would also invite you

to visit our website. You will find there great reflections on contemplation, dialogue, impasse, the global situation, the ecclesial situation, new cosmology to name a few. There are lots of good things on it. Our current web site is www.engagingimpasse.org; and, come April we're going to have a second one. It is www.iccdinstitute.org. They are going to be connected and you will be able to access them both from either address. Finally, if you are on Facebook, just look up *Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue*. Then go and click "Like It,"

| Thank you so much.

Transcribed by,
Bew Parker
20120217