

Listen to the Stories

Carol Quillen, president of Davidson College in North Carolina and a historian, recommends we listen to the stories of people both of whom we agree and disagree. In an opinion article from the Detroit Free Press in August, 2019 (<https://www.freep.com/story/opinion/2019/08/11/what-if-we-thought-our-political-opponents-storytellers/1968083001/>) she writes:

Constructing stories about dead people for living people entails ethical responsibilities. You can't invent, ignore or willfully distort facts, and you can't twist a dead guy's story to fit your agenda or the agenda of your audience. You have to ask thoughtful questions and "listen" to the historical record with an open mind so that you can honor the multi-dimensionality of the people whose stories you will tell.

What if we heard other people's words not as a position to be refuted or applauded, but as a story to be understood? What if we thought about how those stories got created and what concerns they might reflect?

As members of a pluralistic, democratic republic, we strive to be a country where disagreeing is expected. In fact, our willingness to live with and sometimes even relish our differences attests to our desire to be free. One sure sign of "unfreedom" is that everyone thinks, acts, prays and votes alike.

By listening to others as tellers of stories that deserve to be understood, maybe we can develop our capacities for citizenship in a democratic, free and pluralistic society.

- Barb Staniszewski

How to Build a "Bridge" to "Holy Conversation"

A few years ago I went to a conference and heard theologian Richard Gaillardetz, PhD, speak about how to have a "Holy Conversation" with people about subjects that can be delicate and controversial. He talked about ways to listen to each other with open minds and open hearts, to respect each other's thoughts and feelings, and to be able to agree and disagree with love. But how do we find the right words

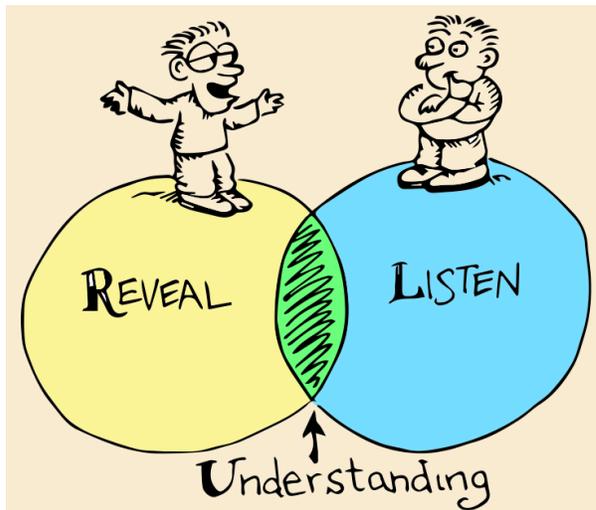
to have a "Holy Conversation"? Perhaps we can find some guidance from a homily that Fr. Jerry Brzezinski shared with us a few years ago.

According to Father Jerry, "Consider the Suspension Bridge as a model for dialogue between

people, especially when there are strong opposing positions: the suspension bridge requires a strong but delicate balance of tension between the two sides where cables are pulling against each other, but for a common purpose. The bridge allows people to get safely from one side to the other, and this common purpose, or value, is essential if it is going to work. The same is true of "value centered dialogue", the importance of strong but delicate balance in our dialogue, always keeping in mind what the common purpose is, bringing us all together!"

So perhaps using this idea, we will be able to build that "Bridge" to having that "Holy Conversation"!

- Sheran Tioran



Confirmation Bias

“If the new information is consonant with our beliefs, we think it is well founded and useful: ‘Just what I always said!’ But if the new information is dissonant, then we consider it biased or foolish: ‘What a dumb argument!’

So powerful is the need for consonance that when people are forced to look at disconfirming evidence, they will find a way to criticize, distort, or dismiss it so that they can maintain or even strengthen their existing belief.”

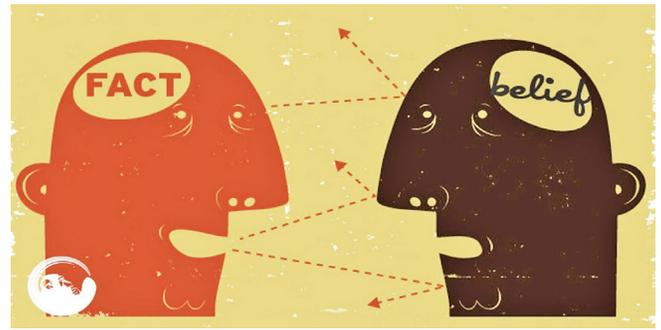
- From *“Mistakes Were Made (but Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts”* by Carol Tavris.

Confirmation bias is a cognitive bias that causes people to search for, favor, interpret, and recall information in a way that confirms their preexisting beliefs. For example, confirmation bias can cause someone who is presented with a lot of information on a certain topic to only remember the bits of information which confirm what they already thought about that topic.

There are four primary ways in which confirmation bias affects people:

- **Biased search for information.** Confirmation bias causes people to search for information that confirms their preexisting beliefs, and to ignore information that contradicts them.
- **Biased favoring of information.** Confirmation bias causes people to give more weight to information that supports their beliefs, and less weight to information that contradicts them.
- **Biased interpretation of information.** Confirmation bias causes people to interpret information in a way that confirms their beliefs, even if the information could be interpreted in a way that contradicts them.
- **Biased recall of information.** Confirmation bias causes people to remember information that supports their beliefs and to forget information that contradicts them.

Confirmation bias affects the way people view political information. For example, people generally prefer to spend more time looking at information which supports their political stance, while neglecting information that contradicts it.



What can you do to reduce the confirmation bias?

- **Try not to form a hypothesis or opinion too early** - try and process as much information as possible before forming an initial hypothesis.
- **Think about various reasons why this hypothesis or opinion might be wrong, or why alternative hypotheses might be right.**
- **Process new information in a conscious and unemotional manner.** Be an active participant in your own reasoning.

For example, if you find yourself immediately disregarding a news article whose headline contradicts your beliefs in some way, you could ask yourself why you did that, and whether you should read it instead of disregarding it immediately. You can even go further than that, and decide that for each article that you read which supports your point of view, you will read one that contradicts it.

Excerpted from

<https://effectiviology.com/confirmation-bias/>

Divisions Facing Our Nation Today

In an article in the New York Times from November of 2019 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/06/opinion/is-politics-a-war-of-ideas-or-of-us-against-them.html>), Thomas Edsall talks about the divisions facing our nation today. He writes:

Negative partisanship - based on animosity toward the opposition party, not love of your own - turns out to be one of the crucial factors in the outcome of recent elections and it will almost certainly be a key factor going into the next election.

The overwhelming majority of voters hold the opposition party in contempt. They are immovable, in some people's opinion, and impossible to convert: "We're seeing anti-party sorting - an increasing number of voters are rejecting at least one of the parties, and they are doing so more strenuously," one strategist said. There are, he continued, more voters who have a very negative opinion of just one party (87 percent) than identify with one of the parties (67 percent). So, negative partisanship explains the behavior of many more voters.

In addition, "negative partisans vote more consistently against the opposite party than partisans vote for their party."

The remaining "persuadables" - an estimated 13 percent of voters, with little or no partisan commitment - will play a central role in determining the outcome in 2020.

Our hope at Justice and Peace is that many of the members of our Catholic, Christian community can become "persuadables", leaving partisan commitment behind and learning more about issues and ideas that all of us are concerned about. It's time to start listening to each other, to leave the animosity behind and find a way to bring our country together.

- Barb Staniszewski

Family, Friends ... and Politics!

Do you get heartburn when a family member makes outrageous political comments at holiday gatherings? Are political arguments tearing apart your neighborhood, school or workplace? Are you tired of choosing between silence, arguing, or compromising your values?

Help is on the way. Since 2016, [Better Angels](#) is dedicated to the idea that rather than seeking a centrist compromise, we need to treat division as a given and foster conversations across it. The premise of this non-profit, volunteer-run organization is that everyone shouldn't agree, but we need to be able to talk to one another, and that such a skill has been lost - to the detriment of us all. [Better Angels](#) offers free "Red / Blue" workshops, debates, and other activities that help people with diverse views to strengthen our democracy through respect, understanding, and action. We can learn the skills to understand the other side's point of view, engage those we disagree with, look for common ground, and seek ways to work together to achieve our common values.

Prayer

Lord, help me to seek truth today -

To find it in places and people I wouldn't otherwise notice.

Teach me that in truth there is wisdom and understanding.

May seeking truth help me overcome my fears and frustrations.

Lord, help me to strive for truth in all that I do today -

That my thoughts, words, and actions may reflect Your goodness.

Show me that only in truth will I be free -

To live honestly and courageously, to love wholeheartedly and unconditionally.

Lord, help me to cherish truth -

Knowing that You are the author of all that is beautiful, good, and true.

May truth reign in my heart, no matter what I encounter today -

Lies, mockery, confusion, or betrayal. Your truth gives me clarity and peace.

Lord, You created truth. You are Truth.

Help me to know truth when I see it,

Learn truth when I am taught it;

Love truth,

Live truth.

Help me to share truth with others today -

Those who are lost and lonely, the brokenhearted and weary,

Anyone who is suffering from visible or invisible pain.

When I am a son or daughter of truth, I am free to be

Fully alive,

Fully myself,

And an honest reflection of You.

By Jim Wallis, Reclaiming Christ

Jim and I found the local [Better Angels Red/Blue Workshop](#) we recently attended down here in Texas to be very helpful. Before the date of the free event, each attendee volunteers to be a Conservative (Red or ‘leaning Red’) Participant; a Liberal (Blue or ‘leaning Blue’) Participant, or a silent Observer. The structured, civil interactions among and between the Reds and Blues helped us all examine the stereotypes about each group, and increased understanding of each other’s beliefs and underlying values. Many participants expressed surprise that the underlying values of both groups were often similar.

For more information about this group, go to their website at [better-angels.org](#). At the moment, there are no Michigan events planned, but there are events in other nearby states, and hopefully there will be Michigan events in the near future.

- Susan Masiak

Who Speaks for Jesus Christ?

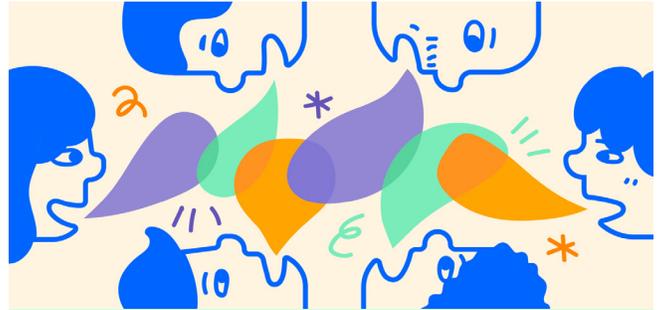
Various religious leaders take to their pulpits, the social media, or newspapers exhorting their followers to vote a certain way because that is what would be “God’s will.” They might throw in several Bible verses to back up their views and then urge all “good Christians” to go out and vote to achieve their “Christian nation” agenda. God bless America!

Political ideologies hijack the Bible to further their own political agendas. Often times, speakers quote extensively from the Old Testament to back up their claims of righteousness. However, the Old Testament often portrays a warring, vengeful God that hands out punishments for anyone disobeying His Word. They ignore the fact that Jesus came to tell us that “Abba” was a loving, merciful, all-forgiving God that embraced everyone and all creation.

The Biblical teachings of Jesus were often times parables, not literal, historical happenings. He urged his disciples to follow him with two commands, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37,39).

Let Jesus speak for himself as you listen to love calling within your heart. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are being called to reflect God’s love for everyone and be witnesses to Jesus’ teachings. Listen to Love!!

- BJ Schlacter



Listening Session and Dinner Discussion

Saturday, February 29 • 6:30pm

Brian Dickerson is a deputy editor and columnist for the Detroit Free Press. In a column written in August, 2019 (<https://www.freep.com/story/opinion/columnists/brian-dickerson/2019/08/11/retirement-community-divided/1965137001/>) he talks about a visit he made to a senior community in Novi (split almost 50/50 in their politics), basing his visit on remarks made by Carol Quillen from Davidson College. He invited an audience of about 200 residents to describe, and listen to their neighbors describe, the life experiences that had shaped their own political convictions.

Did anyone change their minds after this hour-long discussion and listening session? Maybe not, but at least they listened to each others’ stories and began to understand each other a little bit better.

We have invited Mr. Dickerson to St. John Fisher to do the same thing here. **He will be with us on Saturday, February 29, at 6:30pm for dinner and discussion in the Activities Center. Please plan to join us after 5:30pm mass** that day and add to our discussion and our understanding of each other.