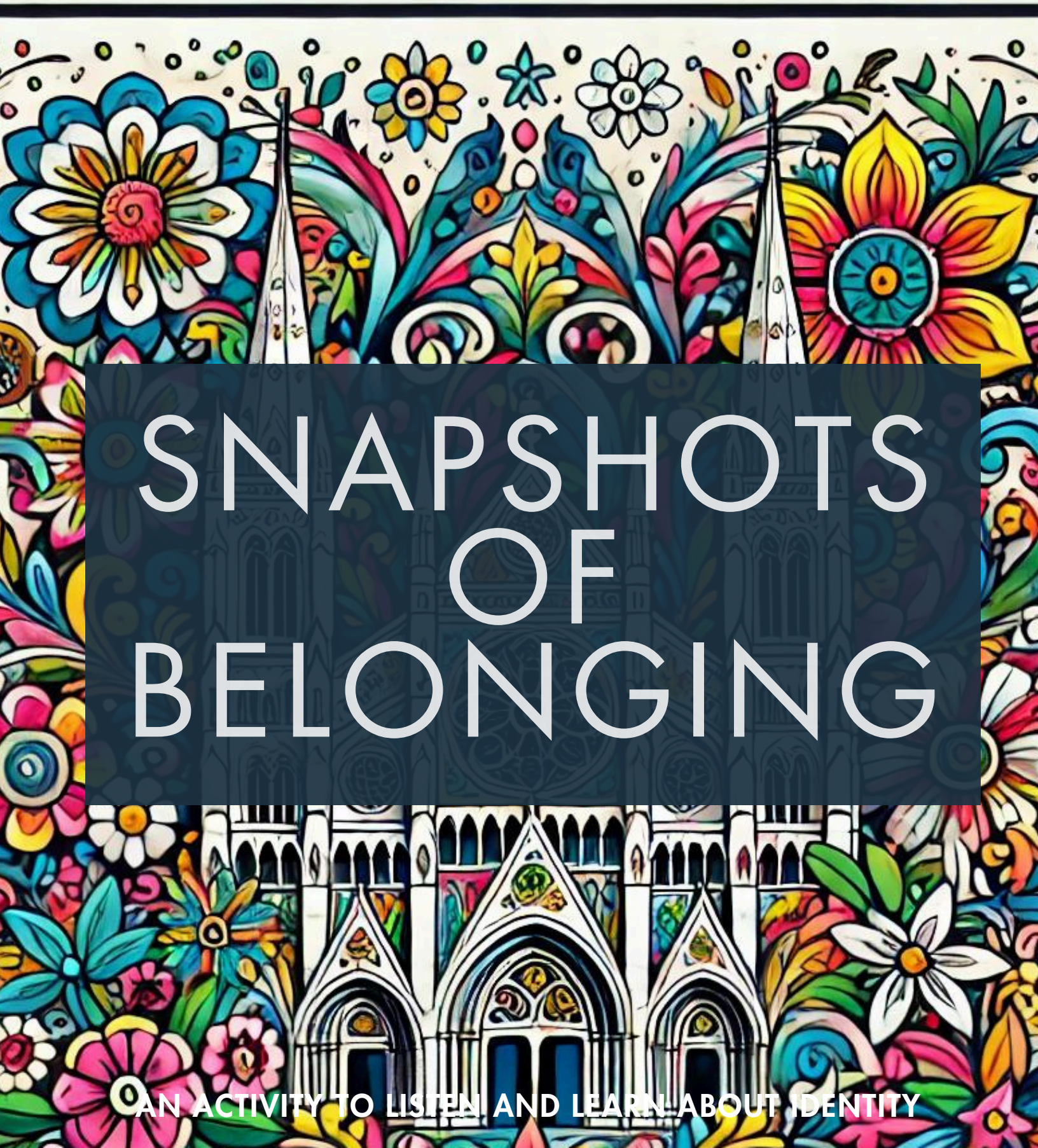
FUTURE OF FAITH

Sacred Tools for Courageous Connection



SNAPSHOTS OF BELONGING

AN ACTIVITY TO LISTEN AND LEARN ABOUT IDENTITY

CONTENTS



LISTENING IS SACRED
A WORD FROM FUTURE OF FAITH



INTRODUCTION TO SACRED LISTENING

Introduction to Sacred Listening
How to Get the Most Out of this Book
Sacred Listening Process



ACTIVITY: SNAPSHOTS OF BELONGING

Purpose
Materials Needed
Set Up
Intentions
Ask and Record
Explore and Follow-up



FOR YOU AND FOLLOW UP

Tips and Tricks for Doing Sacred Listening
DIY Sacred Listening
Follow-up and Reflection
Your Reflection

LISTENING IS SACRED

Listening to each other is a sacred act. Listening to others' stories is an encounter with the profound because we are all made of star stuff, connected by the same cosmic origins. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of all people and the importance of fostering an environment where all voices are valued and heard.

Deep listening can have a transformative impact on others' personal development, emotional well-being, communication skills, and overall sense of empowerment. It also changes the listener.

Listening is more than hearing. It is not a call to respond but to embrace silence and sit with others' experiences. When you're truly listening, you are a conduit to the sacredness of the other person.

Sacred Listening creates connection through empathy, thoughtfulness, intention, and action. It can be infused into community initiatives, family time, and everyday interactions to provide each other with vital skills and emotional tools, equipping us all for a well-rounded life.

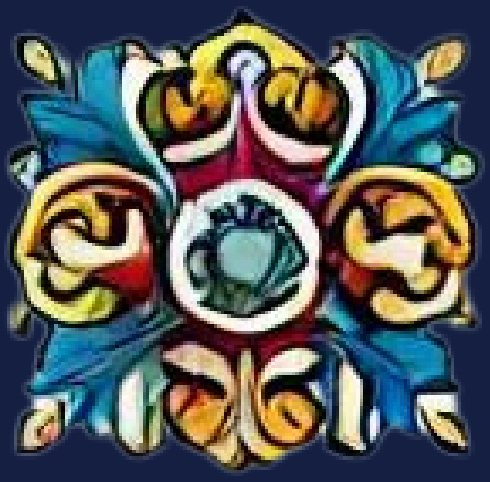
We aim to help you and others in your world to experience a sense of the profound, reinforcing the belief that in each act of genuine listening and understanding, we encounter the deeper connections that unite us all.

A WORD FROM FUTURE OF FAITH



We built these tools as a guide for you to listen to the people in your life with intention and compassion. We based the activities on our lived experiences as sociologists, researchers, research consultants...and as parents. One of the most valuable things we can do for other people is to get out of the way, making space for their voices, while also being present and hearing what they say. We want you to use these tools to really listen - with wonder, curiosity, and empathy.

MEGAN BISSELL
Executive Director



INTRODUCTION TO SACRED LISTENING

INTRODUCTION TO SACRED LISTENING

In the heart of every person is a story—a constellation of experiences, beliefs, and dreams uniquely their own. As guides and champions of their personal, spiritual, and emotional development, you are called to embrace each person with deep reverence and careful attentiveness. This workbook is a guide to honing the art of Sacred Listening, a pivotal skill in nurturing your connection to the people you support in their own life journey. In an era where conventional pathways to community and connection are uncertain or untrusted, listening is the most important thing you can do for someone.

Sacred Listening Theory

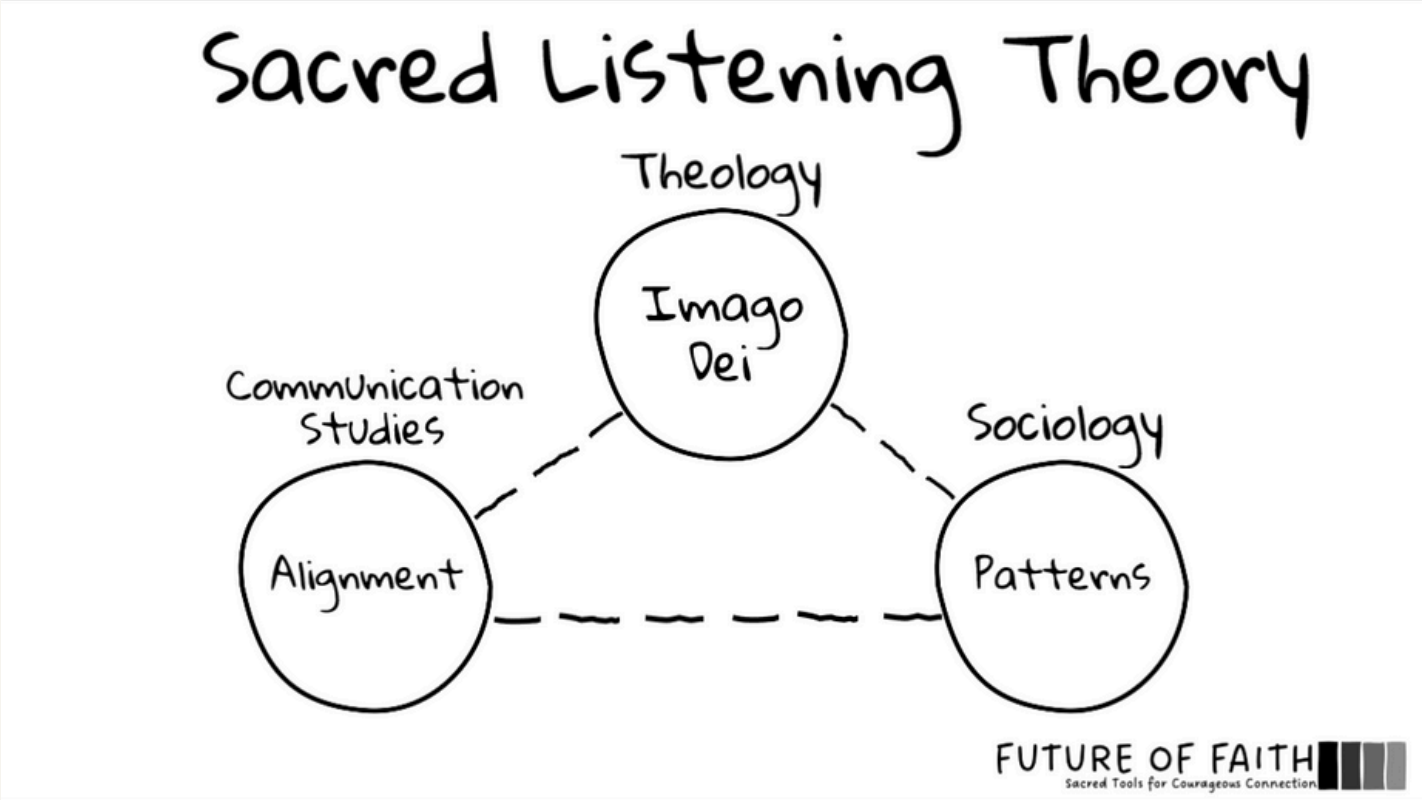
Sacred Listening is both a theory and a process. The three-part theory integrates principles from Theology, Communication Studies, and Sociology. Theology helps us find and embrace the inherent worth of every person, which sets the tone for every interaction (Star Stuff/Imago Dei). Communication Studies centers the importance of genuine engagement (Alignment) in ways that respect the context of the sacred person we're interacting with. Sociology guides the insightful analysis of information we learn from others (Patterns) and gives us ways to use what we learn to connect deeply, follow up and scale relationships beyond ourselves. In short, Sacred Listening is listening to each other in profoundly meaningful encounters, systematically.

Sacred Listening Process

The Sacred Listening process is easy to use, replicable in any setting, and helps scale relationships. It translates to any context and embodies a framework that can be practiced in large settings, small groups, or individual interactions. The process is directly connected to the theory. The first phase (Intentions) of the process is to center everyone by creating a sacred space through ritual and intention setting. The second phase (Ask and Record) aligns everyone through inquiry, sharing, and capturing information, which is carefully tuned to the diverse methods by which people express their lived experiences. The third phase (Explore and Follow-up) requires thoughtfulness and planning to look for patterns in what people share and find ways to use those patterns to follow-up in the ways people need you most.

The diagram on the following page illustrates the theory with the process.

INTRODUCTION TO SACRED LISTENING



Why Sacred Listening Matters

Life moves fast. The ability to deeply connect with others, quickly, is more crucial than ever. Listening authentically can transform interactions, build trust, and create meaningful relationships. Sacred listening allows us to:

- Feel and foster sacred moments with people in everyday interactions.
- Ask meaningful questions and gather important information that leads to deeper connections.
- Recognize patterns in what people are experiencing so that you can respond to needs in a timely and relevant way.
- Scale relationships to build and strengthen your community.
- Form empathetic and open connections that help us receive new ideas, sparking wonder, curiosity, and joy about the world around us in a time where narratives are often fear-driven and negative.
- Be transformed. When we listen deeply to each other, in divine encounter, we are all changed.

INTRODUCTION TO SACRED LISTENING

Scaling Relationships Through Sacred Listening

The future of community is relationships. Our old, institutional methods of connection don't work anymore because people don't trust institutions. Building the future of connection will require an intimate, hyper-local approach, based on individual relationships. All of that is very clear from the mountains of data collected by national research organizations.

But this call to relational work poses a fundamental problem: How do we do relationships at scale? How do we reach hundreds of people and pay attention to their lives?

Sacred Listening Tools provide the framework to do relational work at scale. It is difficult to hold information from all your relationships in your head, especially when trying to connect with dozens or hundreds of people. These tools help you to gather and use information to make and share intentional connections, rather than just relying on your memory. By scaling up (growing our communities), scaling out (involving more people in ministry), and scaling down (deepening individual relationships), we create a thriving, engaged community. Sacred listening is the foundation of this approach, enabling us to connect, understand, and grow together.



INTRODUCTION TO SACRED LISTENING

What You'll Discover in This Workbook

This workbook is designed to walk you step-by-step through the process of Sacred Listening in the context of an activity that fits your setting.
Here's what you will find:

- Easy to follow process: The three-phase Sacred Listening process focuses on interactions and helps you to build your own capacity for deep listening.
- Insightful questioning: Master the art of asking questions that evoke deeper conversations about life, purpose, and identity.
- Ways to identify patterns: Recording information and finding patterns is key to deep connection and subsequent follow-ups.
- Trust-building strategies: Develop techniques to create environments where ideas and experiences can be explored freely and sincerely.
- Replicable practices: The steps of the process are built into a template to help you think of any interaction, event, or activity as an opportunity for Sacred Listening.

The Transformative Power of Sacred Listening

These tools are designed intentionally to be both formative and summative. At the end of each Sacred Listening Tool, you will be left with summative information you can use to take the right, next steps to engage someone, and the process of listening deeply to them will form you both into a trusting relationship.

Sacred listening benefits the listener as much as the speaker. By learning to listen with empathy, we open ourselves to transformation, gaining new insights and a deeper connection with the profound nature of humanity as revealed in the lives of others. In listening, we ourselves are heard; in guiding, we too are led.

Sacred Listening Tools are not a transactional form of information gathering, like a survey, and they are not a one-off experience without structure, like a conversation. They are intentionally designed tools to help transform you and your community into a deeper relationship with the essence of each person.

INTRODUCTION TO SACRED LISTENING

A Call to Action

Let this workbook be your guide as you carve fresh trails in the landscape of contemporary connection. To listen—with full presence—is an act of immense reverence and love. It is within the meaningful exchange of narratives and experiences that trust is reestablished, understanding is envisioned, and lives are elevated.

Thank you for choosing to make this journey, for accepting the call to be stewards of curious souls in a world that sorely needs custodians of spiritual wisdom. Your role is crucial, your presence a light. Together, let us step forth with attentive ears and tender hearts, to listen, to discern, and to love.

> "Being listened to is so close to being loved that we can't tell the difference."
> - Rev. Dr. Frank Thomas

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

This workbook is designed to guide you through the practice of Sacred Listening, fostering deep and meaningful connections. Follow these tips and subsequent steps to ensure you get the most out of your experience.

Take Your Time

Open the activity on a device or print it out. Helpful tip– if you can open it on an iPad or tablet, it scrolls like an eBook. It's a PDF to make sure it can open or print easily.

The first section, "Introduction to Sacred Listening" is just for you to put yourself in the frame of mind. Read through the subsections carefully to orient yourself. These sections share the sentiment, theory, and process for Sacred Listening.

Engage with the content at a comfortable pace. Reflect on the principles and practices presented.

Give yourself the space to fully understand the concepts before moving on to the next section.

Pay attention to the Guidelines section. These were honed through practice and feedback using the tools.

But most of all, make a commitment to shifting your mindset toward relationships rooted in listening as your primary orientation to others in your ministry.

Reflect and Write

When you get to the "Activity" section, pay special attention to the "Purpose" pages. This is the contextual explanation for the specific activity. There are prompts in the activity that queue you to share this Purpose with participants. Take time to write down how you would paraphrase this section or plan to read it aloud to launch the activity. You will share this Purpose during "Set the Tone" in phase 1.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

As you read the Purpose, jot down any questions that arise. These could be questions for yourself, for group discussion, or for further exploration. What else do you want to do with this activity?

Capture any immediate thoughts, reactions, or insights that the content sparks.

Engage with Prompts

Read through the entire "Activity" section and engage with the prompts before you do the activity with others. There are places where you need to think and prepare.

Throughout the workbook, you will find various prompts designed to deepen your understanding and application of Sacred Listening. Take the time to respond thoughtfully.

Use the provided spaces to write your responses. This helps in tracking your progress and insights.

The "Materials" and "Set-up" pages are for your use, with our suggestions, based on the activity.

Read through all of "1. Intentions"

- This is the cornerstone of Sacred Listening, as it's the sacred tone setting part of the activity.
- Integrate your paraphrasing of the "Purpose" of the activity as you plan this phase out.
- Take notes and highlight places where you want to transition, prompt them to do something, or if you need to prepare.
- This is where you'll put together something that will become a ritual for your time together, so choose what you need for that ritual. i.e., a relevant poem or a line of scripture.
- Plan a few reflection questions and prompt them to share a keyword or just take time to write down their thoughts.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

Read through all of "2. Ask and Record"

- Think about the ways you need to be present.
- What distractions are in the room?
- What will you practice and embody during the "Align Expectations" portion?
- Write down any additional questions that you may potentially ask during the "Conduct Meaningful Inquiry" section of this phase.
- Write down actual transitions and segues into next steps.

Read through all of "3. Explore and Follow-up"

- Have a plan for bringing your group or person back together after collecting information. Regrouping for the "Explore" can be challenging, so have a plan to grab them right away.
- This section requires planning and forethought because most people aren't in the practice of looking for patterns in things.
- Let your group or person know that you'll be following up with them, and ask permission for how to contact them, when needed.
- Plan regular follow-up sessions or personal check-ins to reinforce the practices and principles of Sacred Listening.
- Encourage ongoing dialogue and interaction among participants or within yourself through reflection and journaling.

Scale Relationships

Scaling is crucial. Plan for how you will follow-up. It can be tempting to think the work is finished when the activity is concluded, but the real power of Sacred Listening Tools comes in the ways you use the information and trust you've gained from the exercise. Schedule follow-ups and be diligent.

Use the insights gained to expand your practice of Sacred Listening to new contexts and relationships.

Focus on both scaling out (involving more people) and scaling down (deepening individual connections).

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

You don't have to be the only one to follow-up. One of the most significant parts of Sacred Listening is that you will learn things that help you connect people to each other. Where someone in your community might be reluctant to sign up as a volunteer indefinitely, they will be much more likely to reach out to someone who is going through a hard time if it is something they have also experienced. Look for connections between people to help build a culture of relationships.

For You

Following the activity is a space for you to reflect, suggestions for follow-up conversations with your group or person, and a step-by-step template to use to build your own Sacred Listening activities and practice, if you'd like. The activities we create are usually built to be done more than once, but you may have your own questions to ask and things you want to do.



SACRED LISTENING PROCESS

Each tool we build follows the process below. This section is for your information only. All you have to do is follow the outline in the pages that follow and we'll guide you through each of these steps.

Phase 1: Intentions

The person sitting across from you is sacred. The space you are creating together is sacred. Sacred Listening begins by recognizing that the interactions you are having with others are powerful, meaningful, and divine. Sacred Listening starts by setting a very intentional, respectful, and empathetic tone for the session that facilitates a deep and meaningful engagement.

To focus on the Intentions Phase:

- **Establish a Sacred Space:** Everyone is sacred, made in the image of the divine, so the time and place you share with your group should be regarded as sacred. Verbally share that with the group and remind them that your time together is safe for people share without judgement.

- **Set the Tone**: Communicate the Purpose (paraphrase or read) and expectations for your time together clearly. This helps put everyone in a similar frame of mind and sets the stage for a heartfelt exchange. Articulate why you are doing this together.

- **Engage Through Rituals:** Introduce rituals that resonate with the group's cultural or spiritual preferences, such as meditation, prayer, or a shared reading, to deepen the collective sense of sacredness. Work together to co-create a ritual that is meaningful to your group. Recreate this same type of ritual practice every time you come together, even if the content changes.

SACRED LISTENING PROCESS

Phase 2: Ask and Record

Questions signify interest and attention. Genuine curiosity aligns people to one another, leading to inclusive dialogue. But inquiry is not always enough to lead to connection. Writing down what others share actively engages you, demonstrating that you are committed to understanding and remembering what they share. It may seem counterintuitive to take notes while someone is sharing, but it is crucial knowing them more deeply.

To focus on the Ask and Record Phase:

- **Alignment**: Carefully tune in to the diverse methods by which individuals express their experiences and truths. Pay attention to how people are engaging. Do they write things down or speak more? Do they draw pictures?

- **Ask Great Questions**: Facilitate a structured dialogue where participants are encouraged to ask and respond to open-ended, meaningful questions. This practice elevates every voice and opens avenues for deeper inquiry.

- **Write it Down**: Demonstrate active listening by taking detailed notes. This not only shows respect and attention to the speakers but also ensures that the insights gathered are remembered and valued.

SACRED LISTENING PROCESS

Phase 3: Explore and Follow-up

Exploration leads to discovery. Explore the information you wrote down to discover patterns, themes, and ideas that emerge. The patterns you find will give you clues to what is happening with the people you engage with and what you should do to follow-up with them. It will also help you know how to scale relationships.

To focus on Explore and Follow-up Phase:

- **Look Back and Learn**: Use the information you collected to have an intentional conversation. You will work together to spot the big ideas and feelings that kept popping up. Look for trends in keywords, behaviors, and shared thoughts.

- **Keep in Touch:** Set up times to meet again or check in with each other. This shows you care about continuing the conversation and value everyone's contributions. Encourage everyone to keep talking and sharing, whether through social media, regular meetings, or casual get-togethers. This keeps your community tight-knit and growing.

- **Spread the Word**: Think about ways to bring more people into relationship. Maybe start a group or network where these conversations can keep blossoming, reaching more people and making a bigger difference. Use the patterns that you found to help connect people to each other.

> "Listening is being able to be changed by the other person."
> – Alan Alda



ACTIVITY: SNAPSHOTS OF BELONGING

PURPOSE

The Snapshots of Belonging activity is a vibrant tapestry woven from the diverse threads of personal stories and perspectives, particularly from our marginalized youth and community members within the church setting that houses our group. The core of this project—and indeed, all our endeavors—is rooted deeply in listening. Not just hearing, but truly listening to what each individual has to say.

This project is not just about snapping pictures; it's about capturing the essence of our shared and individual experiences, about seeing the world through another's eyes, and recognizing the sacredness in every one of us. It's about understanding that we're all made from the same cosmic dust and that each of us carries a universe within.

Why does this matter? In a world brimming with constant noise and often dominated by voices that drown out the marginalized, creating spaces for silent voices to echo is profound. The church environment, while spiritually enriching for some, might seem alienating for others, especially non-religious youth. This initiative aims to bridge that gap, to foster a mutual understanding and respect that transcends religious and other identities. By engaging both the youth and the community members in a non-religious, yet deeply meaningful activity, we not only showcase the universality of human experiences but also celebrate the diversity within them.

The use of photography as the medium of expression is particularly poignant. A photograph can often communicate what words cannot. It can evoke emotions and insights and can do so in a way that is accessible and relatable to everyone, regardless of age, background, or creed. Each participant is armed with a camera, tasked with capturing images under themes like "Expressions of Joy" or "Places of Belonging." These themes are intentionally broad, allowing for a wide interpretation that reflects the vast spectrum of personal realities and stories within our community.

PURPOSE

But the activity isn't just about taking photos. It's structured around our sacred listening process, which ensures that every participant feels heard and valued. We start by establishing a sacred space, making clear that every participant enters as equals, each a vital part of the narrative we are creating together. We set the tone with opening remarks and shared readings that resonate with universal themes of human existence and community, ensuring everyone starts from a place of reflection and respect.

As the photos are taken and then shared, the project transitions into meaningful dialogue. Participants share why they chose their particular subjects, what those images represent to them, and how they relate to the overarching themes. It's about digging deeper, asking why these moments matter, what they tell us about ourselves and each other, and how they reflect our shared humanity. This dialogue is supported by detailed note-taking, ensuring that every insight and emotion shared is captured and acknowledged.

Finally, the project doesn't end when the photos are shared. We analyze the discussions, identifying common themes and new understandings that have emerged. We look at how these insights can build ongoing connections and foster a deeper community spirit. Follow-ups are crucial; they are the threads that keep the weave tight and strong. We plan future sessions and activities based on the themes identified, ensuring that the dialogue continues, relationships grow, and understanding deepens.

This project encapsulates our commitment to listening and understanding as pivotal to community building. It's a practical demonstration of our belief that every individual is a universe of stories worth exploring and that together, we can create a mosaic of shared experiences and mutual respect. Through this Photovoice project, we not only see through each other's lenses but also learn to view our differences as strengths, weaving a community tapestry richer and more vibrant than before.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- [ ] Digital cameras, Polaroid cameras or smartphones
- [ ] Notebooks and pens for journaling and note-taking
- [ ] Large display boards or a digital projector for sharing photographs
- [ ] Sticky notes and markers for labeling and commenting on photos during discussions
- [ ] Comfortable seating arrangements, ideally chairs that can be easily moved into circles or small groups
- [ ] Decorative items that reflect the theme “We are all made of star stuff” and non-religious symbols of community
- [ ] Computer and printer for producing copies of photos if a live digital display is not available
- [ ] Snacks and beverages to keep participants energized and comfortable
- [ ] Name tags for all participants
- [ ] Sound system for playing background music or for use during presentations if necessary
- [ ] Consent forms for photography and sharing of images and stories

SET UP

Crafting Invitations

- Personalized Invitations: Design invitations that reflect the inclusive spirit of the project. Use language that emphasizes unity and the shared wonder of existence, such as "Join us in celebrating our shared journey through the lens of our diverse experiences. Together, let's discover the stories and sights of our community, illustrating how we are all made from the same star stuff."
- Community Outreach: Distribute invitations through both the youth group's and the church's networks, ensuring a broad reach. Include a brief description of the project's goal to bridge community and youth perspectives through photography, highlighting the secular nature of the activity.

Venue Preparation

- Arrange the venue to facilitate easy movement and interaction:
  - Set up chairs in a circle for the initial discussions and welcome circle.
  - Prepare smaller, flexible seating arrangements for the group discussion phases.
- Set up a central table for snacks and beverages in an accessible area.
- Create a display area where photos can be posted or projected.

Technology Setup

- Test all digital cameras or smartphones to ensure they are fully charged and functioning.
- Set up the projector or display boards for viewing photos.
- Prepare a computer with appropriate software for viewing and possibly printing photographs.

Materials Distribution

- Place notebooks, pens, and sticky notes at each participant's seat or in a common area easily accessible to everyone.
- Distribute name tags at the entrance for participants to fill out upon arrival.

Documentation and Consent

- Have consent forms ready at the registration table for participants to sign, clarifying the use of their photographs and stories.

INTENTIONS

The person sitting across from you is sacred. The space you are creating together is sacred. Sacred Listening begins by recognizing that the interactions you are having with others are powerful, meaningful, and divine. Sacred Listening starts by setting a very intentional, respectful, and empathetic tone for the session that facilitates a deep and meaningful engagement.

01

ESTABLISH A SACRED SPACE

Venue Setup: Arrange the venue in a circle to facilitate open dialogue and equal visibility. Decorate with non-religious symbols of community and unity, perhaps using items brought by participants as mentioned in the invitation.

Welcome Circle: Begin with introductions where each participant shares their name, a little about themselves, and their thoughts on the theme "We are all made of star stuff". This sets a tone of shared humanity and openness.

INTENTIONS

02

SET THE TONE

Make notes about the “Purpose” section that you want to share to set the tone and expectations for the activity. Clarity is kindness. Use your own words or what we’ve provided below.

Share the following about the activity, along with or instead of your notes about the Purpose:

Today, we're embarking on the Snapshots of Belonging activity, which is all about truly seeing and listening to each other. Through the lens of a camera, we’ll capture moments that reflect our personal experiences and the essence of who we are, especially within our diverse community. This isn’t just about taking pictures; it’s about understanding each other’s stories and finding connection in our shared humanity. As we share these images, we’ll engage in deep conversations that help us appreciate the unique perspectives each of us brings, fostering a stronger, more inclusive community. This activity shows care by making sure every voice is heard and valued, helping us all feel a sense of belonging.

Opening Discussion: Facilitate a moderated discussion on the power of visual storytelling and its impact on community understanding and empathy.

Prompts for Discussion: Engage the group with questions like "How can photographs convey stories that words cannot?" and "What does empathy look like in a community setting?"

INTENTIONS

03

ENGAGE THROUGH RITUALS

Opening Ritual (Optional): Start with a poem about the experience and innocence of youth to resonate with the theme of dreaming. Consider using a song about dreaming and listening together or poems like the one below or another that reflects on youth and possibilities.

Dreams by Langston Hughes
Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.
Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.



INTENTIONS

03 ENGAGE THROUGH RITUALS

Spend a few minutes reflecting together and write down what stood out about this for your time together. Use the lines below for more questions or for reflection.

REFLECTION

ASK AND RECORD

Questions signify interest and attention. Genuine curiosity aligns people to one another, leading to inclusive dialogue. But inquiry is not always enough to lead to connection. Writing down what others share actively engages you, demonstrating that you are committed to understanding and remembering what they share. It may seem counterintuitive to take notes while someone is sharing, but it is crucial to knowing them more deeply.

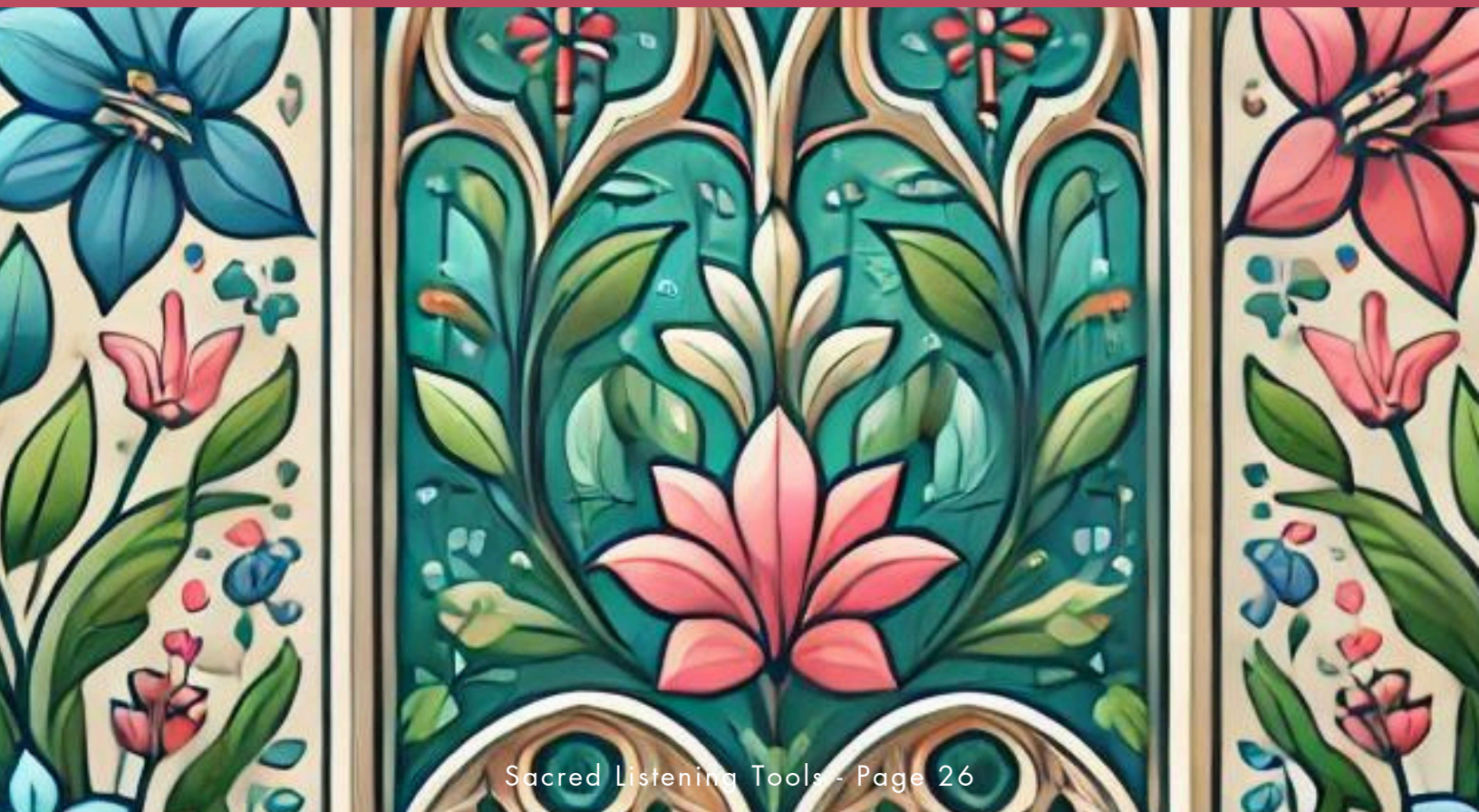
01

ALIGNMENT

Guidelines for Participation: Discuss the importance of respecting each other's perspectives during the photo sessions and sharing. Emphasize that each photograph contributes to a larger narrative.

Group Dynamics: Form pairs or small groups, mixing community members and youth, to encourage diverse interactions. Each group should discuss their photo choices together, fostering a rich dialogue.

Role Clarification: Assign roles for note-taking and facilitating within each small group to ensure that the session's dynamics are balanced and productive.



ASK AND RECORD

02 ASK GREAT QUESTIONS

Guided Theme Exploration: Guide a discussion with the group about prompts or suggest themes that encourage participants to capture images that resonate with themes such as "Expressions of Joy," "Places of Belonging," or "Symbols of Identity." Suggest themes that resonate universally, such as "Community," "Identity," "Resilience," or "Joy". These themes should allow participants to explore their lives and the lives of others.

Window into my world: Encourage participants to capture images that invite others to experience what it's like be them - an image or two each day for a period of time of the important people, places, activities, or moments that make up their life right now.

Aspect Assignments: Assign specific aspects under each theme, like "Symbols of Strength" or "Places of Peace," encouraging participants to think about what these concepts mean to them personally and communally.

Photo Taking Instructions: Each individual participant is given a camera or uses their smartphone. They are tasked to capture images around agreed-upon prompts or use questions to guide the exercise such as:

- "Capture something that you feel represents 'community'."
- "Find an object or scene that resonates with your personal identity within this shared space."
- "What does 'identity' look like to you?"
- "What places or people make you feel 'at home'?"

Interactive Photo Assignments: After individual photo capturing, assign collaborative photo tasks where youths and community members pair up to capture images, encouraging them to engage with and learn from each other's perspectives.

ASK AND RECORD

02

ASK GREAT QUESTIONS

Reflective Pairing: After taking photos, pair participants to discuss their images and write joint reflections. This pairing encourages direct dialogue and helps bridge understanding between different experiences. Participants share their photos with each other and discuss the stories behind them. Use open-ended questions like:

- "What inspired you to choose this subject?"
- "How does this image represent a part of your world?"
- "What emotions or thoughts do you associate with this photo?"

Record words, phrases, ideas, funny moments, meaningful thoughts, etc. below.

ASK AND RECORD

03

WRITE IT DOWN

Note-Taking: Ensure detailed notes are taken during the photo sharing and discussion phases to capture the essence of each story and the perspectives shared.

Immediate Reflection: Allow time for participants to reflect independently on the photos and discussions, encouraging them to write or draw responses that capture their immediate thoughts and feelings.

EXPLORE AND FOLLOW-UP

01 LOOK BACK AND LEARN

Debrief Session: Gather all participants to collectively as a large group to review the photos and notes. Discuss the insights and common themes that emerged, and how these themes connect to the broader community experience.

Structured Photo Discussions: Facilitate sessions where each pair presents their photographs and discusses the stories behind them. Focus the dialogue on understanding and connecting the stories to larger community themes.

Discussion Questions: "What new understanding did you gain from your partner's photos?" and "How do these images collectively enhance our understanding of 'community'?"

Group Discussion: Facilitate a larger group discussion to explore common themes and insights from the small group photo sharing. Use questions like:

- "What common values did you see reflected in all of these images?"
- "How do these photos help us see our community through others' eyes?"

Identifying Common Threads: As a large group, work together to identify recurring themes or new insights that could help foster understanding and cohesiveness within the group. Record the key words on a large white board or shared virtual document.

Discussion and Reflection: Use guided discussions to delve deeper into the themes. Questions like "What common themes did you notice in these photos?" and "How do these images challenge or change your view of our community?" can prompt thoughtful reflection.

Highlight Patterns and Stories: Summarize the patterns and stories that emerged, emphasizing the commonalities and unique perspectives that contribute to the community's richness.

Visual Presentation: Create a visual representation of these themes using the photos and quotes from the session to illustrate the interconnectedness of the participants' experiences.
OR
Gallery Walk: Create a space where all photos are displayed. Invite broader community members to view and discuss the photos, facilitating dialogue between viewers and photographers.

EXPLORE AND FOLLOW-UP

EXPLORE AND FOLLOW-UP

02

PLAN COMMITTED FOLLOW-UPS

Feedback Loop: Establish a mechanism for participants to provide feedback on the session and suggest topics or activities for future gatherings.

Continuing the Conversation: Set up periodic thematic photo challenges that encourage ongoing participation and dialogue. Consider a shared online gallery or a social media page where new photos and themes can be introduced regularly.

Ongoing Dialogue: Encourage the formation of a digital forum or social media group where participants can continue to share photos and stories, maintaining the momentum of the initial session.

Continued Thematic Exploration: Set up future meetings or sessions that build on the themes identified, ensuring continued engagement and deeper exploration of the relationships formed.



EXPLORE AND FOLLOW-UP

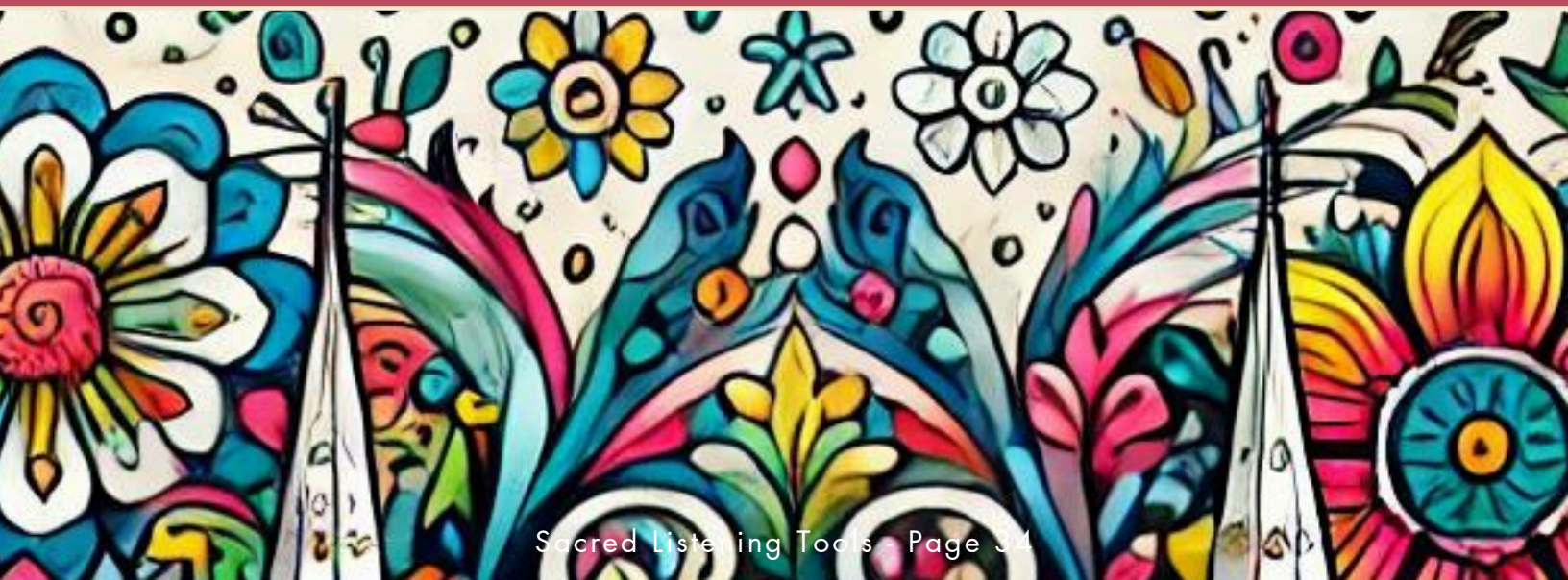
03

SPREAD THE WORD

Community Showcase: Organize a public exhibition of the project's photographs and stories to engage a wider audience and invite new participants into the dialogue. Include panel discussions or Q&A sessions where participants can discuss their work and its impact with an audience.

Expand Networks: Develop partnerships with local organizations to extend the reach of the project, fostering broader community ties and support networks.

Outline below the ways you can use what you did in this activity to engage more of the community or new partnerships that can help support the young people of the Lighthouse.





FOR YOU AND FOLLOW-UP

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR DOING SACRED LISTENING

Lean into the "Sacred"

- Mindset Shift: Remind yourself that every interaction is sacred. That person sitting across from you is a reflection of God, star stuff, divine energy…sacred.
- Understand Intentions: Most people don't take any time at all to breathe, center, be still, or even be present. Intention-setting by using a ritual, no matter how small, anchors you to the sacred being you're interacting with. A deep breath, a moving poem, a song, a candle; it's a symbol of their importance to you, and the significance of the moment.

How to Be Present When Listening

- Ground Yourself: Just as you set an intention for your time with others, make sure you do that for yourself. Before starting an activity, take a moment to center yourself. Deep breaths and a moment of silence can help you focus and be fully present.
- Maintain Eye Contact: Show your engagement and respect through eye contact but be mindful of cultural differences regarding direct eye contact.
- Body Language: Use open and relaxed body language to create a welcoming atmosphere.

Active Listening and Alignment

- Reflective Listening: Paraphrase what the speaker has said to show understanding and encourage them to expand on their thoughts.
- Ask Open-Ended Questions: Encourage deeper conversation with questions that require more than yes or no answers.
- Non-Verbal Cues: Nod, smile, and use other non-verbal affirmations to show that you are engaged.
- Ways of Sharing: Be very intentional about how you ask people to share. Offer options for communication to honor different styles and needs.

Listen More, Speak Less

- Respect Sacred Moments: Consider each person's story as sacred. Avoid interrupting, as you wouldn't disrupt a sacred moment.
- Practice Patience: Allow the speaker to finish their thoughts without rushing to respond.
- Don't Have Answers: You don't need to have answers, solutions, or even a response. "I don't know" is an acceptable thing to say. So is nothing at all.

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR DOING SACRED LISTENING

The Laws of Listening

- Listen First: Prioritize truly hearing the speaker's words and emotions before formulating your response.
- Listen Again: Reflect on what was said, confirming your understanding.
- Listen More: Continue to engage with the speaker's message, demonstrating ongoing interest and respect.

Prime Them to Share

- Preparation: Let participants know in advance that they will be sharing their stories. Give them time to prepare mentally and emotionally.
- Encouragement: Reassure them that their voice is valuable and appreciated. Make sure they know their words are safe with you.
- Transparency: Share your own stories that are relevant without taking up too much space. Be an open person.

Embrace Silence

- Silence is Sacred: Create an environment where silence is comfortable. It is a space for reflection and processing.
- Respect the Pause: Allow silences to exist naturally. If you respect and revere the silence, so will they.
- Make Silence and Normalize it: Be quiet so that silence happens, then emote positively, breathe again, and demonstrate that you're embracing it as a sacred moment. Just let it happen.

Pre-Write Prompts and Follow-Up Questions

- Be Prepared: Write prompts and follow-up questions to pull from in advance to ensure a smooth flow of conversation. You don't want to be formulating your next question while they're speaking.
- Adapt as Needed: Use these prepared questions as a guide but remain flexible based on the direction of the conversation.
- Open-Ended Questions: Use questions like "What has been on your mind lately?" or "Can you tell me more about that?"
- Follow-Up: Reflect back what you've heard and ask for more detail. Example: "That sounds challenging. How did you feel about it?"

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR DOING SACRED LISTENING

Handling Difficult Conversations

- Empathetic Responses: When someone shares something difficult, respond with empathy. Phrases like "Thank you for sharing that with me" or "I can't imagine how that feels" can be validating.
- Follow-Up Ideas: Ask gentle follow-up questions that allow the speaker to elaborate if they choose. "Can you tell me more about that experience?" or "How has that affected you?"

Flexibility

- Adaptability: Be okay with the session not going according to plan. Flexibility allows for genuine and meaningful interactions.
- Go with the Flow: Let the conversation naturally evolve, even if it deviates from the planned structure.
- Patterns: The patterns you discover in the information you collect will make sense to you. Let them emerge and be patient with yourself as they do. You'll see patterns in individuals and in groups.

Transparency and Trust

- Clear Communication: Explain why recording their words is beneficial, especially in spaces where trust may be an issue.
- Building Trust: Be honest about the purpose of the recordings and how they will be used to honor their stories.

> "Silence is essentially a surrender to the holiness of the divine mystery."
>
> – Sister Wendy

DIY SACRED LISTENING

As we started using the Sacred Listening tools in the field, we realized that it would be helpful for you to have a set of prompts and action steps to build your own version using activities that your group or community enjoys. This DIY guide helps you take your local knowledge and put it into our framework so you can use any activity to make connections, gather information, and scale relationships. We suggest following the steps of this guide with your group as a community building exercise!

Instructions: Use this template to create your own Sacred Listening activity for any interaction. It can be used for anything from building a full-scale activity to using the prompts to practice everyday engagement.

01

INTENTIONS

Objective: Recognize and establish the sacred nature of the interaction.

Establish a Sacred Space

- **Prompt**: Begin by acknowledging that each person here is sacred. Remind each other that this space is sacred and free of judgment, where all ideas are welcome.
- **Action:** Describe how you will create a sacred space (e.g., a moment of silence, a grounding exercise).

Set the Tone

- **Prompt:** Clearly state the purpose and expectations for this interaction, emphasizing care and mutual respect.
- **Action:** Write down your purpose and expectations for the session.

Engage Through Rituals

- **Prompt:** Introduce a ritual that resonates with the group's cultural or spiritual preferences to deepen the sense of sacredness.
- **Action:** Describe the ritual you will use (e.g., meditation, prayer, shared reading).

DIY SACRED LISTENING

02

ASK AND RECORD

Objective: Facilitate inclusive dialogue through genuine curiosity and active notetaking.

Alignment

- **Prompt:** Pay attention to how individuals express their experiences. Note different engagement styles.
- **Action:** Describe how you will observe and record these expressions.

A*sk Better Questions*

- **Prompt:** Encourage open-ended, meaningful questions that invite deeper responses.
- **Action**: List three to five open-ended questions you will ask (e.g., "What was a meaningful experience for you recently?").

Write it Down

- **Prompt:** Show respect and attention by taking detailed notes.
- **Action:** Decide who will take notes and how the notes will be recorded (e.g., notebook, digital document).

DIY SACRED LISTENING

03

EXPLORE AND FOLLOW-UP

Objective: Identify patterns and themes to deepen relationships and plan future engagements.

Look Back and Learn

- **Prompt:** Review the notes to identify key themes and patterns. Discuss the big ideas and feelings that emerged.
- **Action:** Describe how you will review and discuss the collected information.

Keep in Touch

- **Prompt**: Plan follow-up meetings or check-ins to continue the conversation.
- **Action:** Write down your plan for regular check-ins or follow-up meetings.

Spread the Word

- **Prompt:** Think about ways to involve more people in these conversations and expand your circle.
- **Action:** Describe how you will share your insights and engage more people (e.g., starting new groups, hosting events).

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

For the 4 weeks following your activity, check in with each person you connected with in a meaningful way. You can text them once a week and either ask them a personally crafted question based on something from your time together, or one of these directed questions. They should know you're thinking of them, and that you don't want anything from them. Note how they responded (or didn't). You don't have to track specific answers, but rather their receptiveness, openness, opportunities you have to adjust your messaging, etc.

Week 1: Have you connected with someone this week that means a lot to you?

Week 2: How many conversations have you had about faith, religion, spirituality, etc. this week?

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Week 3: How many times did you feel uncertain about talking to someone about faith, religion, spirituality, etc.?

Week 4: Who can you go to this week to have a conversation about faith, religion, spirituality, etc.?

YOUR REFLECTION

This page is for your own reflection and follow up notes. This is a great place to capture future questions, observe patterns, and be reflective of your own behaviors, biases, and feelings during this exercise.

Be honest with yourself. Where are the places that you are uniquely positioned to be a trusted person in your community? What is getting in your way? How can you listen better? What are the listening practices you need to develop?

THANK YOU!

We are honored that you are part of the Future of Faith community. We are committed to listening more deeply so that we can have better conversations, ask better questions, and tell better stories in our faith lives. Please visit our website for more exercises focused on different audiences and objectives. www.futureoffaith.org



FUTURE OF FAITH

Sacred Tools for Courageous Connection