

Habits of the Heart for Healthy Congregations Six-Session Discussion Guide

1. Parker Palmer speaks on the role of religion in public life

Holy listening demands that we engage in listening to discover the presence and activity of God in the joys, struggles, and hopes of the ordinary activities of congregational life, as well as the uncertainty and opportunity of change and transition. Listening is holy because we expect to hear the voice, presence, or absence of God. Holy listening demands vigilance, alertness, openness to others, and the expectation that God will speak through them. Holy listening trusts that the Holy Spirit acts in and through our listening. We discern and discover the wisdom and will of God by listening to one another and to ourselves. --Craig A. Satterlee

Watch video: <http://vimeo.com/35024729>

Questions for consideration

- Do you see your congregation participating in the public life as Parker describes it?
- What are the qualities of religious life and practice that could be brought to the public life?
- Do you experience any intersection of religion and the public life in your current setting? If so, where and how?
- In what ways could or should religious life and practice be explicit in public life?

2. Parker outlines his “habits of the heart” from his book, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*.

“No individual can live alone, no nation can live alone, and anyone who feels that he can live alone is sleeping through a revolution. The world in which we live is geographically one. The challenge that we face today is to make it one in terms of brotherhood....” -- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Watch Video: <http://vimeo.com/35023677>

Questions for consideration:

- Which habit do you feel you have the most mastery with? What allowed

you to develop that habit?

- Which habit is the hardest for you? Where in your experience does this show up the most – personally, in your congregational life, and/or as a member of the larger community?

3. Local Madison area clergy and Parker Palmer reflecting on the Habits of the Heart.

loving your neighbor is all very fine when you have nice neighbors. This is why people choose the town they live in. we all want nice neighbors. It's the folks in the next town who are the bad guys. you'd be amazed at how citified folks hate the people in the suburbs. not the suburbs, the people in them. but would they want us living next door? i ask you.

& joan of arc was noisy. she must have made a lousy neighbor & jesus, giving everything away - & ghandi, a walking guilt trip. some people make nicer neighbors than others. but there you have it. city planning

funny how essays on politics, on war & peace, seem to talk about love

--Alta Gerry

Listen to podcast:

http://wichurches.org/sitecontent/MP3_files/02%20copy.mp3

Thoughts for consideration:

As you listened to the experiences shared on the podcast – the singing of “Sanctuary” in the Dominican Republic, the aspens’ root system – what images or experiences have you had that are powerful expressions of Habit 1:” we are all in this together?”

4. An Appreciative Eye for Humanity: Parker and Carrie Newcomer discuss her song, “Betty’s Diner”

“In Christian tradition, the broken-open heart is virtually indistinguishable from the image of the cross. It was on the cross that God’s heart was broken for the sake of humankind, broken open into a love that Christ’s followers are called to emulate. Even as a physical form, the cross—with arms that stretch left and right and up and down-- symbolizes the tension, the “excruciating” tension, that can open the heart to love.

For Jews, learning to live openheartedly in the face of immense and devastating heartbreak is a historical as well as spiritual imperative. So it is no surprise that Jewish teaching includes frequent reminders of the importance of a broken-open heart, as in this Hasidic tale:

A disciple asks the rebbe: “Why does Torah tell us to ‘place these words upon your hearts’? Why does it not tell us to place these holy words in our hearts?” The rebbe answers: “It is because as we are, our hearts are closed, and we cannot place the holy words in our hearts. So we place them on top of our hearts. And there they stay until, one day, the heart breaks and the words fall in.”

--Parker Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, pp. 149-150.

Watch Video: <http://vimeo.com/35024589>

5. Parker speaks on the importance of his fourth habit – A Sense Of Personal Voice And Agency

It Is I Who Must Begin

*It is I who must begin.
Once I begin, once I try—
here and now,
right where I am,
not excusing myself by saying that things
would be easier elsewhere,
without grand speeches and
ostentatious gestures,
but all the more persistently
—to live in harmony
with the “voice of being,” as I
understand it within myself
—as soon as I begin that,
I suddenly discover,
to my surprise, that
I am neither the only one,
nor the first,
nor the most important one
to have set out
upon that road.*

*Whether all is really lost
or not depends entirely on
whether or not I am lost.*

--Vaclav Havel

Watch Video: <http://vimeo.com/35023665>

6. 13 Ways to Understand Community

The hardest spiritual work in the world is to love the neighbor as the self—to encounter another human being not as someone you can use, change, fix, help, save, enroll, convince or control, but simply as someone who can spring you from the prison of yourself, if you will allow it.

--[Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World*](#)

- Parker Palmer reminds us that in community, when the person who drives you crazy leaves, another one comes to take his/her place.
 - How does that change how you think about leadership?
 - How are challenging people a part of your community? What have you learned from them?
- How does the ability of staying in the tension vs running away or going silent connect with the capacity to create community? What are examples in your own life?