

Introduction to
Contemplative Dialogue:
Unleashing the Transformative Power of Communal Wisdom

The following is the transcript of the introduction to the video Contemplative Dialogue: Unleashing the Transformative Power of Communal Wisdom.

My name is Sr. Liz Sweeney, a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia, living and working in Wilmington, Delaware.

About 10 years ago, after years of studying integral development and after more years of working with and holding the suffering of our earth and her people, I felt the urgency in my own ministry of spiritual direction to create small learning communities among those I serve to facilitate this integral transformation of consciousness.

Today's problems, as Einstein reminded us, cannot be resolved with the same level of consciousness that created them. For me that means while I/we value pluralistic scientific rational consciousness which is where many of us reside we realize it's not sufficient to bring about the transformation of culture so needed now.

What that suggests is that more information, more knowledge, is not transformative. I believe that what **will transform us as communities** and as a culture is to learn to grow our capacity to create shared fields of embodied presence and love.

Doing this will allow a higher kind of wisdom to emerge when we are in relationship together—in congregations and in every encounter with another. And I have experienced contemplative dialogue as a means to doing that.

What is contemplative dialogue?

It's a contemplative way of being together; a way of engaging meaningful conversations that are rooted in deep listening ... We listen from an inner silence that creates a space where something new can emerge.

We come together in a circle of peers, of equals (where no one is an expert, no one is teaching, dominating, persuading). We come with the intention of creating a field of presence and love by grounding our awareness in our hearts, our Source, our interiority.

And at the same time, we offer ourselves wholeheartedly to creating communion in this circle as we intentionally listening for something new to emerge.

The word dialogue comes from two Greek words—*dia* which means through and *logos* which refers to word or the meaning of the word.

Contemplative dialogue: We create communion through the meaning of the word.

So in contemplative dialogue, we translate our thinking and our feeling into language that creates a flow of coherence and shared meaning among us. We listen deeply to learn what WE think **and** we listen for new possibilities to arise.

Contemplative dialogue is helpful in some situations and not others. It is helpful when we want to listen and speak with others to discern significant decisions, to think about questions that are important to us or to come to a shared direction forward.

It's not so helpful or necessary, for example, when we are planning the agenda for a meeting or solving a well-understood problem.

A CD session begins with a few moments of silence—

Then we create a container—connecting with each other through the power of story, of vulnerability—The container is what makes it safe for each of us to explore what we feel and think ... honestly, authentically.

As we begin, we practice three skills of dialogue: contemplative listening, contemplative speaking, and third, intentionally creating a WE space among us as we listen to and build on one another's thoughts.

First, the skill of contemplative **listening**: listening with receptivity and without judgment — listening that is inwardly quiet; reverently present. Listening without thinking about what you will say, letting your next thoughts emerge from the silence in-between, making intentional space for those who have another point of view.

And second, the skill of contemplative **speaking**: speaking briefly ... saying what really matters to you, sharing what is arising in the present moment.

It's best if we can share the 'distilled' version— if we have an economy of words. So much of our conversation is chatter but if we think of our words as sacred vehicles of the Word, then, perhaps contemplative dialogue calls us to a deeper presence to our words and to ourselves when we are in conversation.

In a dialogue session, we look at the person speaking ... avoid crosstalk that is, addressing one person in the circle. We speak from our center, briefly, what really matters, what I think ... feel—a few sentences—then STOP.

We allow pauses. Before and after someone has spoken, we return to inner silence ... In the silence between speaking, we try to receive the impact of another's words ... pause to reverence the sacredness of another, her thoughts and feelings.

And, the third skill, creating an emergent WE space where our focus is not on the I, not on the self, but on what's between us. WE space requires an individual I who has a capacity to

transcend “me,” my thoughts and feelings, to become aware WE and of that which is between us, making that space in-between conscious and sacred again.

WE space needs the diverse capacities of each “I” in service of something greater— leading to a higher integration, a deeper communion.

As we dialogue, we try to notice similarities and to build on one another. If you hear congruence between what you and another person think, mention that. Making these connections deepens our communion. We are creating from what’s being offered in the shared field so that something creative and fresh can emerge.

The pace is slow --- so there will be times of silence ... of just waiting comfortably ... contemplatively.

As we begin now, as viewers and participants, let’s take a minute to become aware of that Silence that’s always present in the background.