

An Introduction to Psychological Safety

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Greetings in the presence and peace of Jesus of Christ our Lord.

Thank you for registering for “Gather, Listen, Connect”. You will have received a number of resources to help you prepare to fully participate in our gathering. This brief essay on the topic of Psychological Safety is included in order to support the environment we hope to have on November 15th. As well, the steering committee hopes it prompts meaningful reflection about the way the diocese conducts its inter-personal life as a body.

The field of Psychological Safety has its roots in the 1950’s with Psychologists such as Carl Rogers. It was popularized in the 1990’s by others in the field such as William Kahn, and Amy Edmondson (her book, “The Fearless Organization”, is an accessible read; Wiley and Sons, 2018).

Psychological safety refers to the general climate of a group, the impact of that climate on the individual’s experience and their ability to participate in the environment. Edmondson notes four defining areas:

Inclusion Safety - individuals feel a sense of belonging on the team, where they can be their authentic selves.

Learner Safety - people feel safe to ask questions, admit mistakes, and seek help without fear of being embarrassed or punished.

Contributor Safety – team members are comfortable contributing their own ideas and feel safe to participate in the value-creation process.

Challenger Safety – Individuals feel safe to speak up, challenge others ideas, offer different perspectives or raise concerns without being seen as disruptive.

In our Christian canon, we take similar teachings from Paul’s letters to various communities; all of which had local conflict as part of the context into which he was writing.

In the first letter to the church at Corinth, (familiar to many of us) Paul emphasizes that followers of Jesus are members of one body. He also stresses that you can have amazing gifts given by the Spirit, but if they come without love, they undermine or erase

their value (1 Corinthians chapters 12-13). In other words, as a human, my hubris can deceive me into thinking that my importance, deeply held values, and brilliance can somehow outweigh love and the treasure each of us are in the eyes of God. Paul advocates for 'pursuing love AND striving for spiritual gifts.' They are intended to be held together.

The words of 1 Corinthians 13 are so familiar. We read them at weddings; which is so appropriate, since in all relationships, including our most intimate ones, we are expert in arguing our point of view.

We all need to be reminded of Paul's words:

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we only know in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end." 1 Cor. 13:4-10

Brene Brown in "The Gifts of Imperfection" speaks of pairing love and belonging. She found in her research that when someone spoke of love, they *always* spoke of belonging. I imagine that we know how those Corinthians felt, because we have felt it. If they were (we are) in conflict, in disagreement at a deep level, were they loved? Brene and Paul teach a resounding "yes"!

Brown notes, "We cultivate love when we allow our most vulnerable and powerful selves to be deeply seen and known, and when we honor the spiritual connection that grows from offering that with trust, respect, kindness and affection."

She goes on:

"Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us....and it only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world..."

Brown, "The Gifts of Imperfection", Page 34-35, Hazelden, Center City, MI 2010, 2020

So we have a collection of thoughts and words from our beloved Apostle Paul, Amy Edmondson, a Harvard academic and key leader in the area of Psychological Safety, and Brene Brown, the most famous shame researcher of our generation - who happens to be an Episcopalian! They are all saying the same thing: the cultivation of love is the call of the gospel, involves creating safe space for one another to be able to offer our authentic, imperfect selves, and honor the spiritual connection which grows when we practice love, trust, respect, kindness and hospitality.

It is the sincere hope of the Standing Committee, Discernment Committee and the Steering Committee that “Gather, Listen, Connect” will be an opportunity for the diocese to come together and practice the values of interconnectedness that are explicit in our Christian faith. We do not take lightly the vulnerability people may feel in gathering, especially during a season of conflict in the diocese. We hope and pray we have created a day that will allow all to participate safely and respectfully.

Returning to Edmonson’s key points, I invite you to ponder the following questions as you prepare for the November 15th gathering:

Inclusion safety – do you feel safe to belong?

Learner safety – can you learn in this space through asking questions, experimenting and making mistakes?

Contributor Safety – can you contribute ideas without fear or embarrassment?

Challenger safety – can you question others, including those in authority?

Finally, in the questions at your table conversations (you may find these in the agenda portion of this packet) at “Gather, Listen, Connect”, you will hear the words, “significant” or “meaningful”. These are neutral words. It could bring an experience or perspective to mind that is positive or negative, or even neutral. It could be about a current conflict or something from another time in your life here. It could be traumatic, or, it could be something beautiful that you experienced in the diocese. The point is to share how it contributed or detracted from your sense of love and belonging in this Christian community. Further, we hope that in listening to one another carefully we can hear one another’s stories, perspectives and hopes for diocesan life as it moves forward. The building of spiritual community, with Christ at its center, indeed has the power to heal, guide and transform us all.

As we approach our time together, the Steering Committee is praying for you and our gathering. We ask that you pray for us as we seek to remain faithful to the leading of the Holy Spirit. May God be glorified as we come together in “Gather, Listen, Connect”!

Grace and peace,
+Mary Gray-Reeves