

## Minister's Message – August 2009

### Listen

It is often said that since we have two ears and only one mouth we should listen twice as much as we speak. Is this what you find in your family and friends? Is this what you practice yourself? I was listening to a counsellor on the radio telling how he spends most of his time just listening to people. He encouraged his patients to talk, to share their feelings and their thoughts, while he listened attentively. I remember a textbook on counselling I once studied which taught the same thing, namely that counselling is all about listening.

In today's busy world it is not easy to find someone who will listen. If we want someone to listen to us we have to pay them! Even in families people do not listen to one another. Often the radio or TV is blaring in the background, or people are running out the door to work or some function. Even in churches people do not have time to listen to one another. Sharing and caring is a vital part of Christian fellowship.

Today we have excellent means of keeping in contact with one another. We can not only pick up the phone (and get an answering machine!) but can email or SMS friends instantly. We are keeping in close contact with one another, but are we communicating? Are we listening to each other? As an African man said when he was in London – 'here you have watches but we have time'. We have every means of communication but do we actually communicate. To communicate we must stop and listen.

The young and the old are the most vulnerable when it comes to listening. The very ones who want someone to listen to them are the least listened to. Children are always demanding to be heard. Although they must be taught that there is a time and a place for everything, make sure that they are given that time. The elderly are easily put away and no longer listened to when they are the very ones who have great wisdom to pass on to the next generation.

Counsellors practice 'active listening'. They stop and give their full attention to their client, often restating things the client has said to reassure them they are listening. They do not interrupt and start talking about themselves. In normal conversation it is okay of course to interrupt and share your own thoughts, but it is still important to listen to what the other person is saying, and not just wait till they draw breath.

Jesus was always ready to listen to people who came to him. When blind Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was coming through town he cried out to Jesus. Everyone told him to be quiet, but Jesus heard him and stopped. Jesus listened to this man and healed him. He became a new man who followed Jesus and praised God. You will be amazed at the response of those you stop to listen to!

The twelve disciples could talk to Jesus at any time and he always listened. We do not live with Jesus in quite the same way, but he is still alive and he has given the Holy Spirit to those who believe. He calls the Holy Spirit the 'Comforter' or 'Counsellor' – literally 'Paraclete' meaning 'one who stands beside'. When you repent and believe in Jesus your sins are forgiven and, furthermore, you have a counsellor on hand 24/7. You can come to him at any time and he will listen. He is greater than any human counsellor because he not only listens but gives perfect advice every time. Are you taking full advantage of this great blessing you have in Jesus Christ?

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*