

Sojourners in Cyberspace

This is an invitation to join me in a community formation process in cyberspace. As a son of Abraham, my spiritual father, I too have been called from the familiar to the unfamiliar throughout my life. I too am a child of promise by my Baptism in Christ.

Christians were first called the people of the way. Our journey with Christ as the way connects with our beginnings as sojourners.

My journey into cyberspace as a sojourner began in January of 1999 with the serve list Scripture and Daily Life. The serve list continues on Yahoo with a password for entrance. Rich Paxton, a layperson from Mason City, is our technical person and I continue to serve as a facilitator/learner.

We began with a series of Scripture readings and email conversations focusing on care and compassion. Our first readings were from the sojourner, Abraham, in the Book of Genesis. We then moved to reflecting on the Sunday lectionary as we still do. Our reflections provide an archive on many topics.

In 2003 I began a series of distant learning seminars on the Healing Power of Story Listening for the Wayne Oates Institute. (2. 3.) The Wayne Oates Institute, named after a noted pastoral care teacher, provides Continuing Education Units for health care providers, mainly chaplains. I have been amazed to find you can increase listening skills through email discussions in cyberspace. My evidence is from participants in the seminars who acknowledged an improvement in their listening skills.

The irony of my sojourner story in cyberspace comes from first teaching story listening skills to lay people. The listening model evolved to learning how language functions through metaphors in our conversations. The listening model then moved from non professionals to professional health care providers. In so doing the model became caught in the certification process of professionals. I lost a place to train where it all began, with non professionals, lay people, for ministry in everyday conversations.

Hopefully, in my remaining years I can bring the model back into parish and community life where everyday conversations have a health benefit, especially with chronic illness being the major health issue out in the community. I know this first hand with Bobbie's four encounters with cancer, starting in 1990, and my own encounters with hypertension, heart, and herniated disc. Our everyday support is out in the community and not in health care centers where the consultants reside. Even at the time of end stage facilities like hospice, there is home care time preceeding.

My hearing disability in old age makes workshops impractical for teaching. What works is small groups of sojourners in cyberspace for short learning sessions. The increase in listening skills comes as we read and grow as a community in cyberspace.

To grow in this manner means, like Abraham, we have to leave our comfort zones in the

beginning and sojourn with a promise, moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

Leaving our comfort zone is not an easy decision. Scripture says Abraham was 75 years of age. He was not a young man. What makes this more remarkable, as we age our brains put us in a rut where change is more difficult. Leaving our comfort zone becomes more of a challenge. Abraham, our first sojourner, is calling us. He serves as a worthy model. To have a healthy growing brain requires sojourners. The latest research examining brain images confirms this. (1)

Send me an email if you have a calling to become a sojourner in cyberspace for ministry in everyday conversations.

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(retired certified hospital chaplain and a cyberspace facilitator/learner)

Resource books:

1. Barbara Strauch, The Secret Life of the Grown Up Brain
2. Harold D. Stolovitch and Erica J. Keeps, Telling ain't Training
3. Robin Neidorf, Teach Beyond your Reach