

Advent and Midwifery

Listening can be the advent to transformation, new birth, renewal. I know this. I have seen this. I have done this. I am convinced the Holy Spirit works in our midst at the same time. Consider the advent of the man who came to the pastoral care office with a picture of a lady hugging a tombstone at the Rock Island Arsenal. As he put the picture on my desk he said "I don't want to be like this." Or as St. Paul said before him, "who will deliver us from this body of death." I said he did not have to be like that and the healing process began.

Another advent began with these words, "I am not very religious, I always had too many questions." My question, "What do the first five letters of questions spell?" He said, "Quest." And I said, "That sounds like a very religious journey." The visit continued.

In the later years of the Grief Recovery Group we develop an advent session before new participants joined the various designated groups for loss of a child, spouse, sibling, or parent with Befrienders as conveners. The advent session was an acrostic where in six sessions we went through the words they used starting with letters from the alphabet, a through z, to describe their grief. We covered 4 letters a session. We ended with "zinger." These words provided a pastoral assessment as well as a chance to bond with others using the same word although their story was quite different. The words gave some distance from and well as an understanding of the raw emotions under the surface that a full story would uncover.

In all the above examples I was called to be a mid-wife, assisting folks as they made the journey to come back to life, to arrive at a new place, renew, re-birthing, etc. This wasn't a quick fix. Waiting, prayerful patience, remaining a presence, continually listening, these were a few of the skills necessary as well as being a match maker when a person was close to a break through. Making new connections, *susnesis* is the New Testament Greek word, were part of the experience as well. Guidance from the Holy Spirit was an ever present reality, unacknowledged at times.

"Now that my husband and I have lived our life," was what a lady said during her third admission to the hospital in a few months after her husband's death. I said, "I want you to keep saying that until you hear what you are saying." Shortly there was that Aha! moment when she realized she had died too. She did not return to the hospital with the same medical condition. This encounter took place a number of years ago. I still remember our visit very well. Another facet of the story, the doctor had written in the medical chart under family history, "non contributory." I don't think so.

Being called to be a mid-wife does mean you will be accepted in this role. You have to be ready to be misunderstood and rejected as Socrates who names the process. When I was ready to move the acrostic to all medical diagnostic and treatment procedures, since most patients use the same grief words from the acrostic on hearing a new diagnosis, those who make decisions in the medical community resisted. They were not about to participate in the advent of a new understanding where all patients were more alike than

different. Different diagnoses do require different treatments but a common language grounds the technical language. Also involved in the resistance were separate support systems who were not about to give up their turf. The politics of our present perspectives prevailed.

You can read more about mid-wife and maeutic education in one of Plato's Dialogues. "Theaetetus" For me the parables of Jesus are another form of mid-wifery and maeutic education --- another time.

In the meantime

Advents in our lives and the Advent of the Church year present us with a choice for receiving a new birth, renewal, etc. Let us take advantage of the opportunity by opening the door of our hearts to the One who is coming, knowing that a great amount of preparation has already taken place we can review to renew.

Shalom,
Fr. Whitmer