

Learning to trust again

by [Nancy Sylvester](#)



Sep. 30, 2014 in

- [Contemplate This](#)



Refugee children crossing our border and U.S. citizens trying to block them, Israelis and Palestinians, the Republicans and Democrats in Congress, Russians and Ukrainians, the Shias and the Shiites, Christian and Muslim. The list goes on as I ponder the atrocities that are continuing in the name of God, of country, of truth, of self-defense. In most cases there is no capacity to listen to the other, to engage the other, and so the stalemate continues and the violence increases. Locked into separate silos there is apparently no connection, no relationship.

I agree with so many thinkers today that we are living in a pivotal moment of our evolutionary history. It is not unique but it is our moment. System thinkers refer to it as the chaos point when all the old ways and structures are facing breakdown or breakthrough. I believe as people of faith living in this chaos point there is an invitation to risk new responses that engage the differences we experience and begin to build trust among us once again.

I took seriously each of his concerns and he in turn respected the data that I was able to gather from local areas. This back and forth helped to shape the final language of the amendment. On the day of the vote this senator voted in favor of the NETWORK amendment. I remember sitting in the Senate gallery and catching the eye of the aide expressing in my smile gratitude for his working with me and believing what I offered. Later that year a conservative group put out their annual voting record. This particular senator always received a 100% ranking from them. This year he didn't. They counted this amendment as one of the votes, and his vote supporting it cost him his perfect score.

Certainly what we face today is far graver and more complicated than this example. But I see the outline of how a sustained practice of contemplation opens you to wanting not only to listen differently to others but also to engage them in new ways as well.

Not an easy endeavor nor a quick fix. What I do know is that the ways that we currently try to approach the crises of our time *do not work*. We've had hundreds of years trying them.

So What If? What If

- We were willing to take the time to come together with people who differ?
- We held our own positions gently yet with integrity?
- We listened to each other out of a contemplative heart?
- We were curious about where we differed with each other?
- We explored those differences seeking understanding?
- We created the space where synergy might be possible?

- We were willing to shift our hold on our individual truth so as to affirm the emerging truth of the whole?

I continue to struggle with the challenges this holds for the “activist” in me. How do we do social justice work in this spirit? But I believe there is something here that people of faith are in a unique position to explore and to offer as we move toward breakthrough. In the next reflections I’ll share some of the ways ICCD has been exploring Exercising Contemplative Power.

[Nancy Sylvester, IHM, is founder and director of the [Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue](#). She served in leadership of her own religious community, the [Sister Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary](#), Monroe, Mich., as well as in the presidency of the [Leadership Conference of Women Religious](#). Prior to that, she was national coordinator of [NETWORK](#), the national Catholic social justice lobby.]