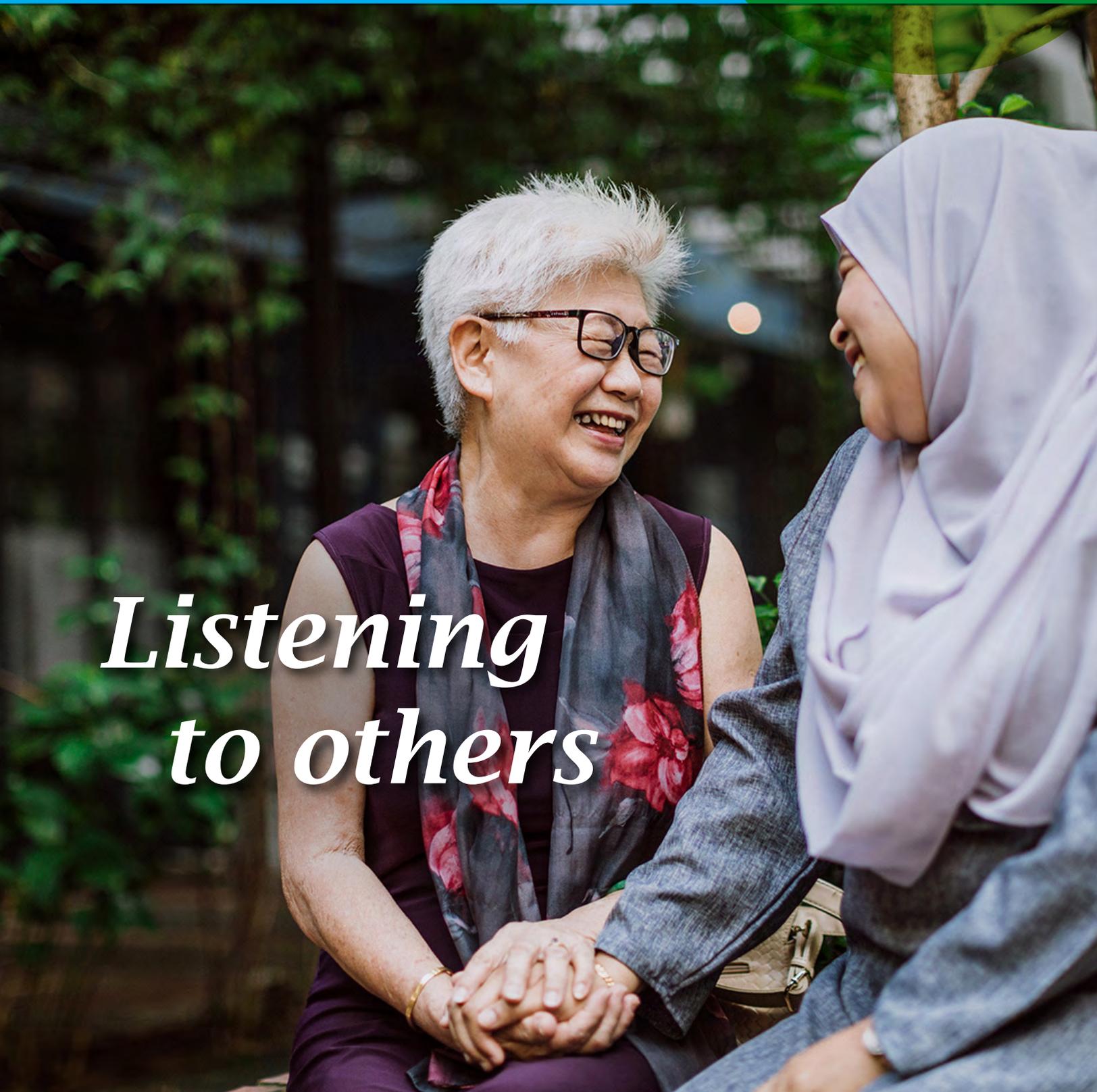




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*Listening  
to others*

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### 4. Listening: Being Present for the Other

At the centre of spiritual accompaniment of sick or elderly persons is an “in depth” listening to what is occupying the spirit and the heart of that person. To listen is to convey to a person with all our being that they are important to us. By listening in-depth, we are welcoming others in what they say; in how they understand themselves; in how they feel. **Denise Desmarteau, CND**

### 6. The New Struggle of Refugees and Displaced Persons

The unconditional welcome of refugees and displaced persons is fundamentally rooted in the Christian DNA. It is just as much our duty to think about the causes of these forced departures. Leaving is a legitimate response but so too is fighting to stay. With millions of displaced persons and refugees around the world, the struggle to return to their home village is only just beginning. At the request of the local churches, Aid to the Church in Need provides emergency support to them, a help that both enables people to stay and helps those who come back. **Mario Bard**

### 8. An Interreligious Experience Full of Meaning

In recent years, the Association of Women Religious for the Rights of Women (ARDF) has set itself the goal of developing solidarity with Muslim women and Indigenous women. This article reports on a meeting with a Muslim woman, Samia Amor, a lawyer and lecturer at the University of Montréal. **Nicole Bernier, CND**

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Follow Us!



# The Voice of the Lord and the Voice of the Voiceless

*Hear, O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord alone! (Deut 6:4)*

Timothy Scott, csa

Jews are commanded to pray this famous text, the “*Shema Israel*” from the Book of Deuteronomy thrice daily, for it expresses their core faith in the one God. Scholars suggest that Jesus’ great prayer in John 17 contains an echo of the “*Shema*” as he prays that all be one, even as he and the Father are one. But I would like to reflect on the verb that begins the prayer, the command to hear.

## Attentive Listening

Over two hundred times in the Hebrew bible, the people are instructed to do just that; to hear. It is an ancient way of calling people to attention, to have concern for something that is primary. In the Gospels, this particular kind of attentive hearing is often expressed by a phrase, “Let anyone with ears to hear, listen!” (Mk 4:9:23) Another dramatic example of hearing is found in the Transfiguration, where the voice from heaven speaks to the disciples, “This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!” (Mk 9:7)

## Hear the Cry of the Poor

Christian discipleship, following the Lord is rooted first and foremost in an active listening. In our personal prayer and in our common worship, we listen to the Lord’s word,

proclaimed and shared in the Scriptures. For as St. Paul reminds us, faith comes from hearing. (Rom 10:17)

But the Scriptures also suggest other voices we need to hear. In the beginning of the Book of Exodus, the Lord hears the cries of his suffering people from their bondage in Egypt, and responds with his great act of liberation. Elsewhere, he is attentive to the poor and suffering, as in the book of Psalms: “When the humble see it, they will be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive.

For the Lord hears the needy, and does not despise his own people who are prisoners.” (Ps 69:32-33 – NRSV)

## Called to Be Listeners

Surely in imitation of the Lord, we too are called to hear the cry of the poor, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised. This is the essence of Pope Francis’ invitation for us to go to the peripheries. In a world filled with noise, we are called to turn our attention to these quieter voices, often drowned out by the wealthy and the powerful. As a community of believers, we are called to hear the voice of the Lord, and to hear the voice of the poor. ■



# *LISTENING: Being PRESENT for the Other*

Denise Desmarteau, CND

Last September, I took part in a formation offered by the spiritual accompaniment service at home for the sick or elderly (SASMAD – Pastoral Home Care) of the Archdiocese of Montreal. This service was founded in 1992 by Sister Madeleine Saint-Michel, Religious Hospitaller of Saint-Joseph. Volunteers who have received specific training make spiritual and/or religious home visits according to the needs expressed by the person being visited.

**“Our life is spiritual through our very existence as a person endowed with reason, by our search for love and the absolute.”**

At the centre of this accompaniment is an “in-depth” listening to what is occupying the spirit and heart of the person. While I cannot report on all the richness and depth of material that this formation offered, I will simply recall that which encouraged me, as a result of this course, to put into better practice the skill of listening.

## Openness and Trust

Spiritual accompaniment is based on the conviction that every individual has a spiritual life that is expressed through a search for the meaning of his or her life and action.

“Our life is spiritual through our very existence as a person endowed with reason, by our search for love and the absolute. Spirituality is also conveyed by the questions we ask ourselves about the meaning of life and death, happiness and unhappiness, being and becoming, God and the hereafter.”<sup>1</sup>

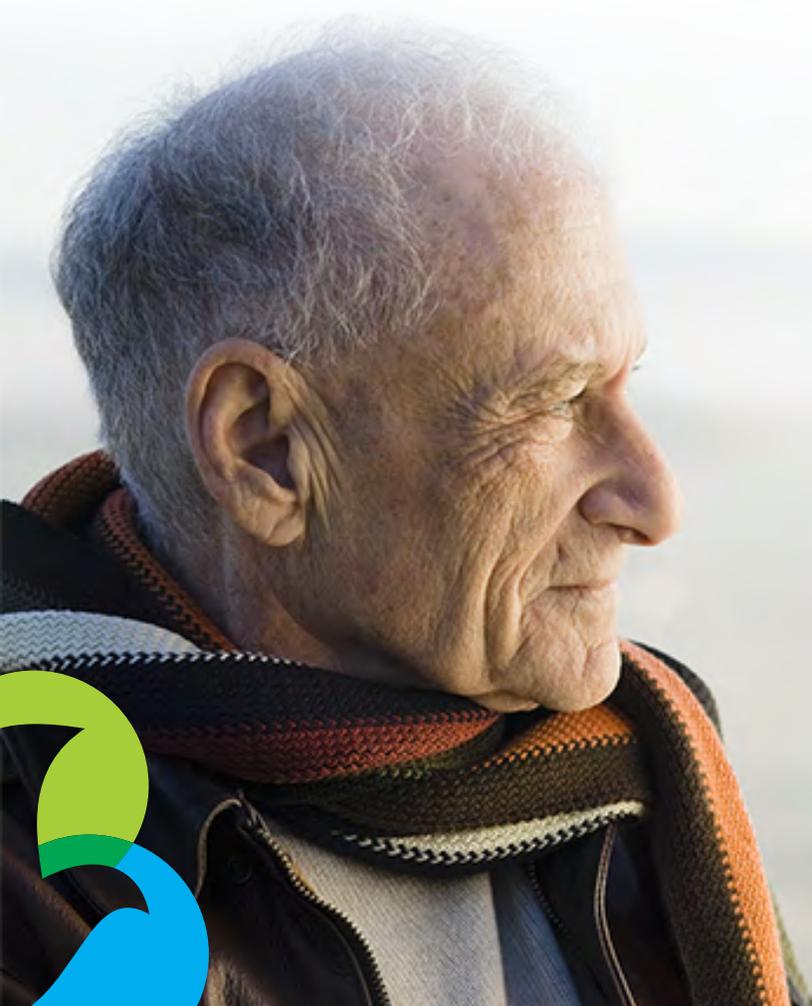
By creating respectful and reassuring human contact, spiritual accompaniment aims to establish a climate of openness and trust and thus offers persons who are visited an opportunity to communicate what interests them, what worries them, and what makes them rejoice.

## Listening Deeply

According to the SASMAD documentation, listening is like saying to persons visited that they are important for us, that we are happy that they are there, that we appreciate their presence. This message is conveyed not necessarily with words but with our physical expressions, our actions and our whole being.

Listening in-depth means welcoming others as they say they are, as they understand themselves to be and as they feel. It is being attentive to their needs, at their request of the moment, while welcoming what awakens in us as they entrust to us.

Genuine listening to people requires great inner freedom to welcome the others as they are, to grasp what they are saying with the words they speak or the emotions they manifest; the needs they express. To listen is to encourage others to become aware of their resources and their power to choose the direction they want to give their lives.<sup>2</sup>



## Personal History and Society

“Our personal history is not just about our inner states or our relationships with our loved ones. It has a direct link with the state of the society in which we live at a given time, as well as with the groups that compose it.”<sup>3</sup> This statement by Maurice Angers invites us to reflect on the impact that the important transformations taking place in our institutes and our societies have on our experience.

“The nights are laden with life and no one knows the day to come.”<sup>4</sup> This theme, discussed last May by Elena Lasida, designates the current state of our institutes remarkably well. What impacts do these nights have on personal security, on community life, on the apostolic commitments of people? This is a question that our gatherings are trying to answer.

Chapters, forums and group meetings are all offering extensive information to our members about the present state of our religious congregations. These assemblies are important places for a broad listening to the Institute’s members, the circles of action and the appeals of the Church and the world. Conferences and formation days on advanced age and the mission of the elderly are also invitations to listening and sharing of life experiences.

Should we not encourage the willingness and perhaps the courage to share questions, emotions and opinions raised by the profound changes taking place in our institutes and in our personal lives?

## When the Listened-to Becomes the Listener

We can all, each and every one of us, continue to show attention to each other with a smile, a greeting, a friendly conversation. These marks of attention convey meaning to others; that they are important to us and that they are part of the family.

Simple, open and non-judgmental exchanges, in small groups can, also favour deep listening. It can provide the milieu required for accepting feelings aroused by the transformations being undergone by our institutes. These are conversations in which each person is heard and take turn to listen.



If people with the desired training and availability were to become committed to providing spiritual accompaniment in our communities, how happy would the members of our communities be; they would benefit greatly from such support.

## Listening, Accompanying, Being There

“It’s enough just being there,” wrote Jacques Gauthier. “Accompanying someone in the twilight of their lives is to be a witness to a work of love in the making. We know it; it is above all to listen more than to speak, to be there more than to do something ... To be there to be born and to grow with the person.”<sup>5</sup>

Being available to offer our sisters and brothers simple and warm listening is like Jesus on the road to Emmaus. We ask ourselves the same question Jesus asked to the disciples: “What are all these things you are discussing as you walk along?” (Lk 24:17). May the listening offered arouse in every man and woman, the joy of the risen Christ. ■

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Gauthier, “Spiritualité et vieillesse, la voie de l’intériorité” (Spirituality and old age, the path of interiority), in *Spiritualitésanté*, Québec, Spring-Summer 2012, p. 28–32.

<sup>2</sup> SASMAD, Information drawn from basic training documents for future counselors.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Angers, *Se connaître autrement grâce à la sociologie* (Getting to know one other differently thanks to sociology), Éditions St-Marin, 2000, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Elena Lasida, Conference at the CRC General Assembly, Montreal, May 28, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Gauthier, *ibid.*

# The New Struggle of Refugees and Displaced Persons

## Mario Bard

The unconditional welcome of refugees and displaced persons is essential, fundamentally rooted in the DNA of Christians. It is just as much our duty to think about the causes of these forced departures, on average 44,000 every day.<sup>1</sup>

Welcoming refugees, while essential and Christian, is not always the only solution. For example, when the crisis in Syria began the media here spoke about the continuation of the Arab Spring, which seemed to be burgeoning all over the entire Middle East. But very rapidly, it was discovered that the Syrian conflict was proving to be the beginning of a much more complex period in this country, a country that is known to be the cradle of Christianity. “Stormy times ahead” was what many people predicted.

Today, at the time of writing these lines, the tornado of abuses created by the various belligerent factions in Syria is almost over. The loss of the Islamic State (IS), the most stronghold group in Syria (announced March 1, 2019), will now put an end to the long sought-after caliphate. The IS will go back into hiding, for better and for worse...

## Reconstruction Campaign

Christians can finally return home. Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), along with other partners on the ground, are now starting a rebuilding campaign based on the model of what ACN has already accomplished in Iraq on the Nineveh Plains which was the historical land of Christians.

Since 2017, nearly 46% of the Christian families who had fled the rapid advance of the IS in August 2014 have returned home. This means that some 9,108 families have returned to their hometowns or villages.<sup>2</sup> A so-called ecological Lamborghini, given to Pope Francis in November 2017, was auctioned off for more than a million dollars.

The ACN received \$300,000 of that sum, which enabled the rebuilding of a daycare centre run by the Church. The second project is a parish hall that will also be open to the entire population of the region, regardless of their religious denomination.

## To Leave or to Stay?

Without the ACN, families returning to the Nineveh Plains would have perhaps gone to North America or Europe. One could easily predict that no one would have returned to their historical bastion.



Portable cabins providing a secure refuge for Iraqi Christians of Nineveh Plains, fleeing the Islamic State. The “Werenfried Village,” located in the Kurdish capital, Erbil, has given hope, most of all it has saved the lives of these victims of a genocide, recognized in 2016 by three governments in the world / © Aide to the Church in Need

In 2014, the call for help from local churches was simple: help the displaced families in Erbil, capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. More than 1,000 containers thus enabled the creation of the so-called Werenfried Village, in honour of the founder of the ACN, who was himself familiar with the plight of refugees. Today while Werenfried’s international organization supports mostly projects of a pastoral nature (whose dimension is broad!), it sometimes returns to the origins of its creation with respect to assisting refugees with infrastructural needs, especially when the local Church asks for it.



Father Werenfried with children, in the earlier days of the ACN. / © Aide to the Church in Need

## The “Bacon Priest”

Europe, 1945 to 1947. The Yalta agreements are established. The conquerors carve up Europe among themselves, particularly the state of Germany. As a result, some 14 million people are going to flee Soviet forces from the Eastern zone (Soviet) to the Western zone (American and British).

Father Werenfried van Straaten recounts: “There were so many arrivals that the admission requirements were getting harder

and harder.” He met a woman whom the British had turned away, forcing her back to the zone’s border. Refusing to return to the hell of Soviet forced labour, she slit her wrists. “I still feel that the desperation that reigned everywhere was intentionally provoked by Stalin,” Father Werenfried would later say. “He wanted to reinforce the chaos in this defeated Germany in order to unleash a new revolution.”<sup>3</sup>

From these experiences and from testimonies given by refugees was born a work dedicated to feeding bodies — thousands of kilos of pork collected in a few weeks in the Flemish countryside! — but also a work to replenish souls. Priests with backpacks would go out on bicycles with provisions, but also with what was necessary for prayer and comfort. This work helped to contribute to an unprecedented period of peace in Europe that still continues today. Following this, a number of Caritas organizations in the world took up the helm.

Father Werenfried, who was fascinated by the message of Fatima, would build to feed the souls. He would be one of the first in the West to denounce the ravages of the communist regimes, from which religious persecution emerged and became one of the bitterest fruits.

## Emergency Support

Today, the ACN provides emergency support to refugees and displaced persons at the request of local churches. Most of these communities are located in areas of extreme conflict: Nigeria, South Sudan, the eastern portion of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), but also in Syria and Iraq.

This support emphasizes the essential presence of Christians for the societies in which they live. It is a proven fact that in the countries of the Middle East, the genocide desired by the IS could have happened, were it not for the presence of local Christian communities. The Christians both present in the Nineveh Plains and in Syria since the beginning of Christianity would be nothing more than a beautiful museum memory.

In eastern DRC, people panic when they are told the good news: your region is rich in natural resources! “War is coming,” they respond. The same phenomenon is increasingly seen further north, in the beautiful Central African Republic. The smoke screen? Wars of religion. The real reasons behind the conflicts? Groups want control over natural resources.

Just as Father Werenfried denounced the perverse effects of the communist regimes of time, daring to denounce or *inform*, as it referred to at the ACN, can sometimes enable support to be provided to those who have no choice but to leave. Iraq, Syria, DRC, Central African Republic area are all countries where we help the Church that is supporting the emergency and allowing people to stay.

Leaving is legitimate. Fighting to stay is just as legitimate. With 68 million displaced people and refugees around the world, the struggle to go back home is only just beginning.<sup>4</sup> ■

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

<sup>2</sup> This ‘return home’ occurred as of January 11, 2019

<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from *Père Werenfried, un géant de la charité (Father Werenfried, A Giant of Charity)*, by Jean Bourdarias, Fayard, 1997

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>



Christian refugees in the so-called “Werenfried Village,” located in Ankawa, outside the Kurdish capital, Erbil. / © Aide to the Church in Need

# *An Interreligious Experience* FULL OF MEANING



## Faith

*Faith is a gift from God. Religious plurality, the diversity of people, languages and cultures are part of the divine plan that invites us to converse together. For God is like a multi-faceted crystal and each of the religions present a different facet. Encountering one another will allow all facets to be seen.*

Her faith varies according to her state of mind, but it is always there; its constancy helps to overcome the difficulties of everyday life and gives her courage. For her, faith is the only constant.

## Nicole Bernier, CND

For the past few years, the Association of Women Religious for the Rights of Women has set an objective to develop solidarity with both Muslim women and Indigenous women.<sup>1</sup> To that end, we organize meetings with one or the other of these women to listen to their experiences in order to better know them and build bridges with them. We want to learn what they find important in their culture and religion.

This article reports on a meeting with a Muslim woman, Samia Amor, a lawyer and lecturer at the University of Montréal. Samia came from Algeria 23 years ago to escape the war in her country. This meeting day was held in Montreal two weeks after the attack at the Quebec City Mosque in 2017.

Let us hear Samia tell us about her faith and her life of prayer.

## Prayer

For Samia, it is important to find the meaning of prayer. Her day is nourished by five prayer times that are appointments with God, opportunities to reconnect with Him and to wonder about how to live with the other. To get closer to God, it is necessary to get closer to others. Sometimes she needs to adjust to everyday situations, such as postponing a prayer time if she is busy in a class or at a conference and praying in a public place like the metro (subway). The important thing is answering the call to the appointment and resuming contact with God.

Listening freely to Samia allowed the participants to learn to celebrate our similarities and to break down our prejudices. Let us listen again to her talking about interreligious dialogue.

<sup>1</sup> The Association des religieuses pour les droits des femmes (ARDF).

## Interreligious Dialogue

*This process is a means at our disposal to discover mutually one another, a chance to come to know better one another and a way to join forces to live better together. We are all human beings living a faith in the same God. Faith brings us closer, but at times irritants causing prejudices, which in turn often divide us, also sometimes stifle it. It seems important to identify those irritants, to find a common ground that rallies us and to find common actions in which we feel that we are together. Let us go back to the message of our faith(s) that is focused more on the essential than on the ritual. In our approaches to reconciliation, let us avoid using filters that change our perceptions and keep this objective: to mutually discover one another.*

According to the Second Vatican Council, one of the Church's missions is to be in dialogue with the world and with the major religions in order to promote mutual understanding, social peace and cooperation in service to the common good. These kinds of conversations can bring those who engage in them to focus on the most authentic values of their own tradition, such as humility, gratitude, serenity, concern for the neighbour in need and the desire for social justice.

Interreligious dialogue sparks a revitalization in all the traditions involved. That is why Christians believe that when a dialogue is experienced with a free and listening heart, the Holy Spirit is present because it acts throughout the whole of human history. In Catholic practice, we are seeing the emergence of the idea that the plurality of religions is a gift of God that allows us to rejoice and be grateful.

The understanding of plurality of religions as a gift is imperative for today. I can still hear, resonating in my ears, the words that were uttered several times by the son of the teacher who was killed in Quebec City: "If I could have had coffee with Alexandre Bissonnette, this tragedy would not have happened."

## A Ritual of Communion

In the course of this day with Samia, we wanted to experience a ritual of listening and communion with the victims of the attack in Quebec City, in which six Muslims at prayer were killed. A visual prepared for that purpose showed the photo of the six victims, each accompanied by a candle to signify the light that might shine forth from that event.



Samia took advantage of this opportunity to express her grief, she who had always seen Quebec as a haven of peace, a land of welcome in which she felt safe after leaving a country at war. The participants were invited to express in a few words their feelings about this event: shock, shame, solidarity, urgency to know each other better, opportunity for a new beginning. This ritual ended with the song *Je vous laisse ma paix* ("Peace I bequeath to you," Jn 14:27).

This day proved very rich: It provided us with a meaningful experience of openhearted listening, letting us be transformed in order to live together in harmony. It also gave us the desire to continue this interreligious conversation whenever and wherever the opportunity might present itself. ■

# THE CRC AT A GLANCE

## Mission Statement

Established in 1954, the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is an association that brings together 250 leaders of Catholic congregations of religious men and women in Canada.

*“The CRC is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. Our mission is to encourage our members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. We support them in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for innovative ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe.”*

Mission statement adopted in 2010

## Theological Commission of the CRC

The Theological Commission was established by the Administrative Council of the CRC in September 1999 to deepen the meaning of consecrated life according to a theological approach that integrates the contributions made by human and social sciences. The Theological Commission proposes future directions that will inform consecrated life in a creative and prophetic way while taking into account the various charisms of the congregations.

## CRC Publications

Published three times a year, the *CRC Bulletin* presents reflections on different aspects of consecrated life in relation to the orientations and objectives of the Canadian Religious Conference.

Issued monthly, the *CRC Newsletter* (formerly *Le Lien CRC Link*) provides information on the commitments and activities of the CRC, on the life of religious congregations, on the life of the Church and on community groups involved in social justice.

