

## Tips for Beginning a Holy Listening Ministry in Your Church:

Here are some resources and tools to use to implement a Holy Listening Ministry. Included are the following documents:

- Presentation for parents explaining Holy Listening
- Tips for training a Holy Listener
- Prayers and Steps for Holy Listening
- Handout for Leaders (teachers) giving a synopsis of Holy Listening

*Below is a presentation, shared with parents and leaders at the start of a new school year. I think you will find it helpful in explaining what Holy Listening is and what it is not, along with the steps of Holy Listening, some stories of Holy Listening, and some general use guidelines.*

### Holy Listening Presentation

One of our church's mission is to intentionally bless all children both inside and outside of our church. Our Holy Listening ministry, developed by Dr. Rev. Leanne Hadley helps us to achieve that goal.

- Have you ever wished for a safe place to share your feelings without judgement?
- Do you value *really* being heard – where someone is actively listening to what you are saying instead of planning what they will say next?
  - It is a common human need that we all share – the need to connect, to be listened to, all without judgement.
    - Nowadays, in our technology driven world, people exchange more information than ever, but studies show that people are lonelier than ever. People need each other to step up and be present. We hunger for this.
- HL addresses these issues by creating a sacred space, where a hurting child can experience God through using tools designed to help the child share his feelings.
  - It is not therapy; one is not giving advice or trying to fix something. It is simply creating an environment of trust and God does the rest.
  - It is based on the scripture, “Where 2 or more are gathered, there am I with them.” Matthew 18:20
  - You are simply a tool in the hands of God to be used for His good purposes.
- HL creates this sacred and safe space where the HL is present and uses excellent listening skills.
  - It is a place where a child can be vulnerable and share their feelings.
  - It is a place where God shows up and begins the healing process, by allowing the child to go from victim to survivor.
  - It is a place where we realize that God is enough and He will care for us.

**We train our classroom leaders about HL and then ask them to encourage the children to use HL.**

- As they get to know the children in their class, they may observe if a child is not acting like themselves and feeling bad.
- During our gathering time when the children share their joys and concerns, we ask for the leaders to be mindful if they think a child could benefit from an opportunity to further explore some feelings.

- Then the leaders encourage the child to do HL or else let a HL know that a child could benefit from doing HL and we invite the child to do HL.

### How do the classrooms request a HL?

- It's very simple. Each classroom has some cardstock crosses with a heart, (show example), our symbol for HL, and they have a magnet attached to the back.
- Have the child put a cross on the doorframe and then the HL will know that someone wants to speak to them.
- The HL wear name badges to identify them as a HL. They will come to the door with the same cross in their hand signifying they are ready to speak with a child.
- We ask our leaders to be nonchalant about HL. We don't want there to be any "stigma" for using a HL – If you are hurting, you talk to someone. Our church is a safe place.
  - That's one of the reasons it is done in the open in the hallways – also for safe sanctuaries requirements

### Demonstrate Holy Listening. Have a table set up with HL materials laid out.

- **Light candle** – to remind us of God's presence
- **Holy Listening stones**
  - (Have stones turned down and invite the child to turn over each stone, one at a time. This gives them the chance to look at each stone as they gather their thoughts.)
  - Ask the child to choose stone(s) that are showing what they are feeling.
  - After they have shared, then say something that acknowledges that you understand what they say.
    - "It's really sad when your pet dies or it hurts when you feel left out"
  - It's important to fight the urge to fix or rescue the child. That's one of the hardest things when doing HL.
- **Prayer time with child** – "Now let's have some time with God."
  - chance to be still and to experience God
  - each person prays silently. Have the child say "Amen" to indicate they are finished praying.
  - empowers the child to realize they can pray on their own; their prayers are enough
- **Invite the child to snuff out the candle**
- **Bless the child** – very important...helps the child leave the space without any regrets and is a reminder that God is near.
  - Ask the child what symbol they would like for their blessing.
    - Look the child in their eyes, say their name, and tell them they are a blessing.
    - We use a lavender essential oil roll on to bless with.
    - **Release the child back to God to do the healing**
      - *Eventually healing and connection happen. This is when the child is ok. They still acknowledge the hurt, but have hope that life is a blessing again*
- **Prayer tool optional** (prayer beads are giving out if child requests or if the HL thinks it could be helpful)
- One of the beautiful things that occurs during HL is experiencing the children being so open and vulnerable. It is inspirational. I realize how courageous they are and it encourages me to do the same.
  - As the Bible says, a child will lead and they do as they demonstrate their faith and trust in God during HL.

- When we first began our HL program 3 years ago, we saw many children regularly who came to do HL quite often. Many of the kids would share the happy and joyful things going on in their life such as upcoming birthday party or trip. *They like the one-on-one conversation and like being heard.* Just think, “When you we ever get someone’s undivided attention? “
- We believe it is important to rejoice in the good times as well. During our prayer time, the HL will encourage the child to thank God for all the goodness in their life, but also reminds the child that God is always there. He wants to know everything about you. This is a safe place to share concerns or if something is sad.
- However, we see an environment of trust blossom. Children are going deeper with their sharing and feeling more comfortable telling their hurts.
  - One child experienced a very traumatic experience on vacation and immediately sought out a HL to share it with.
    - Every child has a different experience
    - **HL is modeling to the child to take their troubles and joys to God.**
      - *God wants to have a relationship with us, so he wants to hear it all.*
- We also have parents asking us to encourage their child to do HL for various circumstances that their child is experiencing. We are always happy to help.
- All children deserve to be heard. Some children have a very public tragedy and the church embraces them and intentionally cares for them, as is the right thing to do. There’s a conscious awareness around them. But some children experience more private hurts. Maybe they sit by themselves at lunch every day, or are bullied. But their hurts are every bit as real and important, needing attention too. Holy Listening puts everyone on an even playing field by being an available resource to anyone feeling a need.
- I think a quote from one of our 2<sup>nd</sup> graders sum it up best. His leader asked him “Why do you like going to HL?” Child: “It just makes me feel better.”

*“I choose to pour My Light into you so that you can be a beacon to others. There is no room for pride in this position. Your part is to reflect My Glory. I am the Lord.” – Jesus Calling Devotional– June 6<sup>th</sup>*

*Here are some tips for training someone to do Holy Listening.*

### **Tips for training a Holy Listener**

Holy Listening creates a sacred space where the hurting child can experience God through using tools designed to help the child share his feelings. It is not therapy; one is not giving advice or trying to fix something. It is simply creating an environment of trust and God does the rest. You are simply a tool in the hands of God, to be used for his good purposes. Just pray, “God, help me do what you are blessing.”

### **Steps for Holy Listening:**

Have a table which helps define the “sacred space” in a room with the door open or in a hallway. Make sure you are visible or in an open area so that safe sanctuary practices are used.

- 1. Initial Conversation** – something to break the ice before doing HL
  - If I am unsure if a child has been to Holy Listening, I will ask them what they know about HL, such as "Do you know why we do HL?" and then if needed, I explain to them that it is an opportunity for them to share their feelings and experience God in a sacred space, using some special tools to help them.
  
- 2. Light the candle** – to remind us of God’s presence.
  
- 3. Use the Holy Listening Stones** – these are tools used to help children express authentic feelings. They use symbols rather than words because symbolic language is the primary language of children. The symbols were chosen carefully, so that each symbol could become whatever the child is feeling and wanting to express. There is no “right or wrong” to the meaning. They are simply symbols used to help children begin to identify and formulate their thoughts and feelings.
  - Lay the stones on the table face down.
  - Ask the child to look at the stones and to turn over each one so the symbols are face up.
  - Then have the child choose some stones that show how they feel.
  
- 4. Discovering Conversation** – holding Sacred Space; listening to the child with full focused attention on them.
  - Ask the child to share why they chose the stone(s).
  
- 5. Period of Authenticity** – after expressing authenticity, child may experience guilt/shame; this is a very vulnerable time, so don’t stay here too long.
  - Repeat what they said again for clarification, without judgment. (Validation)  
Examples of things to say:
    - “I heard what you said.” (Some may try to change the subject).
    - “I love how you were honest with me.”
    - “You have done important work.”
    - Sometimes children may only share “happy” feelings. It’s important to rejoice with them in their good times too, as we are building a rapport with the children.
  
- 6. Prayer Time** – a chance to be still and have time with God,
  - “Now let’s have time with God.” Both you and the child pray silently together.
    - Empowers the child to realize they can pray on their own and their prayers are enough.
      - To help you know when the child is finished praying, have them say “Amen” aloud when their prayer time is ended.
  
- 7. Invite the child to extinguish the candle using the snuffer.**

- 8. Blessing the child** – Ask the child, “What symbol do you want for your blessing?” Many children choose hearts, suns, rainbows or crosses.
- Using blessing balm or oil, look the child in their eyes, say their name and tell them they are a blessing. You can add “God loves you the way you are today.” Or “God goes with you.”
  - Then silently say a prayer to God **and release the child back to God. (This is very important to do so you are not carrying the child’s burdens with you, as God is ultimately in control.)**
- 9. Prayer Beads** – These are an option tool to give a child depending on their circumstance. Let the child choose their prayer beads and demonstrate how to use them.

In Holy Listening, we believe and trust that God can do anything. We create the sacred space for the child and then He does the work. By doing this we are modeling to the child to take their troubles and joys to God.

What you do does not have to be perfect for God to work through you and bless it. Don’t be intimidated at the start.

*“I choose to pour My Light into you so that you can be a beacon to others. There is no room for pride in this position. Your part is to reflect My Glory. I am the Lord.” – Jesus Calling Devotional– June 6<sup>th</sup>.*

**Misc. Note:**

If a parent were to ask what the child talked about in HL it’s ok to talk to them in all instances except in the case of suspected abuse. Suppose the child revealed there was abuse in the house and the parent asked about the conversation. In that instant, the HL would protect the child and not reveal the conversation. The HL would tell Children’s Ministry staff about it and Child Protective Services would be called. In any abuse cases it is not advisable to share with the parent as they may “coach” the child in what to say when CPS calls them.

*I tape these prayers and the steps for Holy Listening inside the lid of my box for my Holy Listeners to refer to if needed.*

**Prayer to say before doing Holy Listening:**

As I meet with these children today, please bless us with your presence. Through my words and during our times of silence, may I hold a sacred space for you. In Your Holy Name I pray. Amen.

**Prayer to say *after* child has shared:**

Dear God, thank you for (child's name) and for inviting me to hold sacred space for You to do the *real work* that needs to be done today. Bless (child's name). Journey with (him/her). Be present during times of joy and times of struggle and pain. Open the doors that will lead them to You and the love-filled future You desire for them. I now release (child's name) and lay (him/her) in Your loving arms knowing that you hold them closely, today and always. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

**Steps for Holy Listening:**

- ❖ Initial conversation
- ❖ Light candle
- ❖ Holy Listening Stones
- ❖ Prayer time with candle
- ❖ Bless the child
- ❖ Prayer Beads (optional)

*"For where two or more are  
Gathered in my name, I am  
there among them." Matthew 18:20*

*This is a handout for our leaders (teachers), to refer to and help them understand the significance of Holy Listening.*



## **Holy Listening**

**Purpose** - Holy Listening creates a sacred space where a hurting child can experience God by using tools that are designed to help the child share their feelings. The Holy Listener is simply a tool in the hands of God, to be used for His good purposes.

**Who uses it?** – Any child experiencing hurt or feeling troubled by something or any child who just wants to talk to a caring Holy Listener. *We don't want there to be any "stigma" surrounding Holy Listening. Treat it like it is a very natural thing – if you are hurting you talk to someone; our church is a safe place*

**What will happen in Holy Listening?** – *The Holy Listener does very little...God does the work. The main job of the Holy Listener is to listen without judgment, or trying to rescue the child. We hold Sacred Space for the child. It is done by .....The child and Holy Listener sit together at a table in the hallway, light a candle, use the Holy Listening tools, pray, a blessing is given, and then the child uses a candle snuffer to extinguish the candle.*

*Prayer time – each pray silently; chance to be still and experience God.*

*Blessing is very important... helps the child leave the space without any regrets and is a reminder that God is near.*

*Eventually hearing and connection happen. This is when the child is ok. They still acknowledge the hurt, but have hope that life is a blessing again.*

**How will I let the Holy Listener know they are needed?** – On Sunday mornings, during the 10:05 Faith Formation hour, each class has some magnetic crosses with a heart on them. The child places the cross on the outside of the doorframe. The Holy Listener comes to the door holding a similar cross signifying for the child to come with them. OR If a Holy Listener is needed another time, please contact Janet Hagerty to schedule a time to meet.

**Our Holy Listening team:**

(list names)

**Janet Hagerty – Holy Listener Coordinator**  
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*Matthew 18:20 "For where two or more are gathered, I am there among them."*

Please feel free to call me if you have any additional questions.

Take care as we navigate this new way of ministering to our families and children during these uncertain times.

Peace,

**Janet Hagerty**

Early Childhood Coordinator/Holy Listener Coordinator

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