

EXPLORATIONS



Phone: 410-366-1851
 Fax: 410-243-7062
www.listeninghearts.org
<http://blog.listeninghearts.org>



Board of Trustees

Patricia Brown
 Barbara Cates
 Mike Croghan
 Suzanne Farnham
 Joseph P. Gill
 The Rev. Timothy Grayson
 Patricia McLean
 Frances Sullinger



Founder

Suzanne Farnham

Office Manager

Laura McConnell



Inside this Issue

Keep on Sifting
 The Rt. Rev. Gladstone B. Adams III

Gratitude as Gently Flowing Discernment
 Suzanne Farnham

Gratitude
 Mike Croghan

Keep on Sifting

**The Rt. Rev. Gladstone B. Adams III
 Skaneateles, NY**

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to sit in silence for a considerable amount of time at the top of the traditional site of the Mount of Transfiguration, known as Mount Tabor. There was a lot stirring in my heart and soul, much of it vocational in nature, but not exclusively. I was not in any kind of crisis, but I was looking deeply into the ways my heart needed to be broken open in order to more completely fall in love with God.

I also wasn't looking for certainty, as in specifics for which way next to turn. I had learned by this time that the search for certitude can often be chasing after an idol rather than the God in whom I sought to put my trust. In an encounter I had with Mother Teresa in a small group in Calcutta she said, "It's called the Christian faith, not the Christian certainty. Our search for certainty can be an idol, cutting us off from knowing the depths of the surprise and beauty of God's very self."

With that in mind, I come to these thoughts on discernment from a grounding principle of my own faith: I am on this earth first to glorify God and, trusting that I am held by God's love, to participate with God in communicating God's mercy and love for all. The work of discernment is best done in community, all the while in service to God's community and our part in it. I am God's beloved. You who are reading this are also God's beloved.

Starting with an awareness of our belovedness as a gift of God's grace, we aspire to do what we can to have our spirits awakened to God's Spirit already residing in us. To put it another way, we are here to open our hearts to the conversation of love and mercy that is always going on within the community of the Triune God. That's what Jesus was doing on the holy mountain where he "went up to pray." We seek to join that same conversation. It's called prayer.

Wherever we may find ourselves at any given moment can be our mountain—the living room, a grocery store line, our office desk, standing in a rushing stream casting a fly. Use your imagination. Like Jesus, Moses, and countless others over the millennia, we come to pray, to discern, as in opening our hearts to the movement of God among us and within us. I like to remind folks that "to discern" literally means "to sift."

(Continued)

Whenever I think of sifting, I think of my father. Growing up in Baltimore, I have fond memories of his love of gardening and the many days I sat watching him prepare the ground for planting. Across the street from our house was a lush woods with deep, moist, dark topsoil as its bed. He would push his hands into the soil and lift it up and let it fall between his fingers, as if it was an offering to the Creator of all things. The soil had a sweet, aromatic, earthy fragrance that infused the air around us and drew me into the dust from which I was formed. Dad taught me that the nutrients of that rich black earth were being prepared for this moment from the beginning of time.

The gardens of azaleas, boxwoods, figs, and roses, however, needed further sifting. So he built a sifter, welding a large open-grid steel cage three feet by four feet, mounted on legs, into which one could shovel the earth taken by wheelbarrow from the woods. A crank on the end would turn the entire contraption. For chunks inside that needed further breaking down there was a second crank handle on the opposite end that rotated an interior forked blade that I would often turn in order to break up the clumps. All of this mechanism spun on an axis as a very fine mound of transfigured soil would build up under the sifter. It was then ready to be taken to the garden into which various plant life would be placed and rooted.

I invite you to step inside this extended sifter metaphor and walk around a bit. In the process of discernment (it is a process, not a one-time event), we take all that is offered to us, including data, life experience, Scripture, tradition, the perspectives of the people around us, our innermost heart struggles and joys. We then place it all into the sifter of the prayer of heart, mind, and soul. Maybe we will even have to break up a clump or two along the way, the clumps of our own unwillingness, fear, suspicion, and struggles with trust, anything that would indicate our own heart-resistance to the Spirit's movement.

Do not get me wrong. I am not saying that we are seeking the one choice that is of God and we must figure out what that is. Usually, discernment is not about choosing between a right choice and a wrong choice. My experience is that most often we are presented with choosing among several goods. Our sifting then leads us to possibilities; we come to a place where the Spirit seems to say, "Choose one and be faithful." In my own prayer, I am looking for sacraments, that is, outward and visible signs of God's grace showing up around me. We are being called to discern, to sift out, which sacrament best serves us, our community, and the world as we engage it.

In the Scripture readings for the Feast of the Transfiguration (Exodus 34:29-35; Luke 9:28-36), we find Moses and Jesus in their own processes of discernment. In the Exodus account at Mount Sinai, Moses dares to take off his veil before God, who wishes to be known. We, too, gaze upon the face of God as God looks upon ours. Jesus, generations later on another holy mountain, was completely and transparently in that moment, so drawn by grace that he knew who he was as God's own, placing his whole trust in the One who called him forth. We, too, seek a quality of awareness shown forth by these two giants of the faith as we open ourselves to the beauty of God's grace.

Be the sifter. Receive the richness of what has been placed in you and before you. Listen. Breathe. Keep silence. Hope. Love. Then, with Jesus, pray. Somewhere along the way take a step, make a decision, perhaps sifting some more, all the while secure in the arms of God who loves us with wild abandon.

Gladstone "Skip" Adams is the retired Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Central New York. He has been a friend to Listening Hearts for many years. He currently lives with his wife, Bonnie, in Skaneateles, NY.

LISTENING HEARTS MINISTRIES
VOLUNTEERS



*We are grateful for the people who volunteer their services
and for those who made in-kind contributions in 2022.*

Patricia M.C. Brown

Barbara Cates

Elizabeth Connell

Michael Croghan

Alice Dorrance

Chris Dorrance

Suzanne Farnham

Joe Gill

The Rev. Timothy Grayson

Betsy Howlett

Stephanie G. Hull

John McIntyre

Patty McLean

The Rev. Bruce McPherson

The Rev. Charles Minifie

Frances Sullinger

Dick Weise

Tish Weise

Anne Whitmore

LISTENING HEARTS MINISTRIES
CONTRIBUTORS



*Thank you to the many friends who share in the work of
Listening Hearts Ministries through their financial support.*

2022 CONTRIBUTORS

Eleanor and Robert Abarno,
Silver Spring, MD
The Rt. Rev. Gladstone B. Adams III,
Skaneateles, NY
Eleanor and Mark Anderson,
Ulster Park, NY
Richard and June Austin,
Chesapeake, VA
Jessica B. Barnes, Pauline, SC
The Rev. Patricia Barrett,
Port Townsend, WA
The Rt. Rev. Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows,
Indianapolis, IN
The Rev. Canon Lynn Bates, Shelburne, VT
Jennifer Blakeney and Marius Juodisius,
Cleveland, OH
Dr. Mary Chandler Bolin, Lexington, KY
Judith and Douglas Bowers, Vienna, VA
The Rev. Lyn G. Brakeman,
Simsbury, CT
J. Michael Brown, Colerain, NC
Patricia M.C. Brown and Joseph P. Gill,
Severna Park, MD
Nancy A.L. Burch, Warrenton, VA
Barbara Cates and Matthew Stremba,
Baltimore, MD

Doris Christopher, El Cajon, CA
Sara M. and Robert M. Condon,
Myersville, MD
Shelia L. Creswell, Vienna, VA
Michael Croghan, Herndon, VA
The Rt. Rev. Glenda Sharp Curry,
Birmingham, AL
The Rev. Susan Dean, Mercer Island, WA
Joan Diver, Boston, MA
Alice and Christopher Dorrance,
Vero Beach, FL
Dr. John M. Douglass, Jr.,
Vestavia Hills, AL
Jean Dunbar, Spartanburg, SC
Mrs. Sarah T. Eastman,
Falls Church, VA
Gail Ernevad, Williston, VT
Austin and Renée Farnham,
Baltimore, MD
Brent and Peggy Farnham, Atlanta, GA
Suzanne Farnham, Baltimore, MD
Randall and Connie Fegley, Shillington, PA
Pamela Fleming, Towson, MD
Jim and Anita Gabler, Jupiter, FL
Diane Gipson, Boston, MA
Nellie and Robert Gipson, Unadilla, NY

Pat and Tom Gipson, Raleigh, NC
Barbara W. Gray, Louisville, CO
The Rev. Timothy H. Grayson,
Timonium, MD
DeAnn Gruber, Mandeville, LA
The Rev. Albert Halverstadt
and Susan Weeks, Denver, CO
Phoebe Carter Hethcock,
Sewanee, TN
Deacon Emily C. Holman,
Parkville, MD
Captain Charles M. Howe,
Coronado, CA
Stephanie G. Hull, Baltimore, MD
Nancy E. Kelso, Baltimore, MD
The Rev. Allan Knight, Chester, NH
Marguerite Y. Lance, Chestertown, MD
Kathleen and Steve LaPlant,
Baltimore, MD
Edwin (Gus) and Deborah Schultz Lewis,
Baltimore, MD
Brenda J. Logue, Woodstock, MD
Richard G. McAllister, Poulsbo, WA
Patricia S. McClure, Fair Oaks, CA
Laura McConnell, Baltimore, MD
Sonia B. McDuffie, Spartanburg, SC
John E. McIntyre and Kathleen Capcara,
Baltimore, MD
Patricia L. McLean, Baltimore, MD
Bruce and Phebe McPherson,
Annapolis, MD
Carolyn Austin Miller, Austin, TX
Caroline H. Morse, San Diego, CA

Sharyn D. Niermann, Carlsborg, WA
Anne and Fred Osborne III, Garrison, NY
Lee and Jenny Owen, Jupiter, FL
Susan O. Owen, Gibson Island, MD
Darrel and Anita Parke, Vienna, VA
Joan P. and Peter Partridge, Towson, MD
The Revs. Charles and Evelyn Payson,
Fernandina, FL
Mary Hope and Richard Rhodes,
Spartanburg, SC
Miguel and Olga Schon, Baltimore, MD
Truman T. Semans, Brooklandville, MD
Lottchen V. Shivers, Baltimore, MD
Laurel Stewart, Longmeadow, MA
Janet and Lee Taylor, Towson, MD
The Rt. Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton,
Baltimore, MD
Mr. and Mrs. L. Lawrence Tully,
Cazenovia, NY
Nancy L. Tunnessen, Chapel Hill, NC
Marc Wall, Washington, DC
Anonymous
Captain and Mrs. Sibley Ward III,
Coronado, CA
Susan Waxter, Baltimore, MD
The Rev. Jennifer and Mr. Benjamin West,
Cranston, RI
Stephen and Patricia Wilcoxson,
Phoenix, MD
Norma Williamson, Vienna, VA
Eleanor W. Winsor, Scottsville, VA
James B. and Julie Young, Coronado, CA

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTRIBUTORS

The Baltimore Community Foundation,
Baltimore, MD

The Blue Grass Community Foundation,
Lexington, KY

Episcopal Church Women of
Church of the Holy Comforter,
Vienna, VA

Outreach Team, Church of the
Holy Comforter, Vienna, VA

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland,
Baltimore, MD

The Central New York Community
Foundation, Syracuse, NY

The High Poplars Foundation,
Vero Beach, FL

The Owen Charitable Foundation
Jupiter, FL

The Gipson Family Foundation,
Raleigh, NC

The Tianaderrah Foundation,
Unadilla, NY

Gratitude as Gently Flowing Discernment**Suzanne Farnham, Founder
Baltimore, MD**

Gratitude is thankfulness that we feel deep within. It is reverential. It is wordless prayer.

On a momentous occasion, it may automatically well-up from our innermost depths. Or at the sight of rare beauty, it may sweep over us on its own. But in the small blessings that come to us over the course of an ordinary day, gratitude often passes us by unnoticed. For example, we can be so task-oriented that we fail to fully appreciate the small nod and friendly smile of a stranger on the street, or the thoughtful gesture of someone who slows down their car to let us pull out into the flow of traffic on a busy road, or the upbeat demeanor of a cashier at the supermarket, or when the weather turns clear just in time for a much-anticipated outdoor event. These things bring joy, but we may not take time to feel the gratitude. Countless small blessings surface in a regular day. If we make a conscious effort to be alert to them and pause for a moment to feel our thankfulness, we can cultivate gratitude in everyday life.

Although it is beneficial to take stock of our good fortune retrospectively, its impact is stronger and more lasting if we are attentive to each blessing as it occurs. In recent weeks I have been making a concerted effort to be attuned to all the goodness as it flows through my life each day. It takes perseverance to stay alert. I fall short much of the time. Nonetheless, gratitude is beginning to flow more readily. As I progress, I start to feel truly thankful for the lessons emerging from my failures and missteps. Sometimes I even find myself feeling grateful when someone irritates me, if I am able to put myself in their skin and empathize with them. Experiences, pleasant or painful, present opportunity for growth. That is reason enough to feel deeply thankful for them.

For example, we can be so task-oriented that we fail to fully appreciate the small nod and friendly smile of a stranger on the street, or the thoughtful gesture of someone who slows down their car to let us pull out into the flow of traffic on a busy road, or the upbeat demeanor of a cashier at the supermarket, or when the weather turns clear just in time for a much-anticipated outdoor event.

Gratitude releases hormones that reduce stress and subdue fear. This makes us more relaxed and less defensive, enabling us to be more loving. Gratitude fills us with a sense of abundance and a desire to share. Although we may not explicitly be seeking discernment, as we try to live a life of gratitude we find a form of spiritual discernment unfolding without our even realizing it. The path forward simply unfolds before us, which in essence is spiritual discernment. Amazing! The Indian-American author Deepak Chopra delves beneath the surface of this phenomenon when he says, "Gratitude opens the door to the power, the wisdom, the creativity of the universe." AMEN.

Suzanne Farnham, an Executive Program Associate, is the founder of Listening Hearts Ministries, coauthor of the Listening Hearts series of books, the original architect of the Listening Hearts programs, and serves on the Board of Trustees. She has been leading programs from coast to coast for more than thirty years. A special exhibit entitled ABUNDANCE: Too Much, Too Little, Just Right currently at the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore aroused in her a realization of the profound value of gratitude, leading her to write this article.

LISTENING HEARTS MINISTRIES
MEMORIAL EPISCOPAL CHURCH
1407 BOLTON STREET
BALTIMORE, MD 21217-4202

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Baltimore, MD
Permit no. 4315

MISSION STATEMENT

Listening Hearts Ministries
provides a range of programs,
publications, and services that teach
people the practice of spiritual
discernment through prayerful listening
in supportive communities.

Discernment is “sifting through” our interior and exterior experiences to determine their origin. — Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community, 30th Anniversary Edition, p. 21

Gratitude

I would have thought they would keep
a day of such immense beauty
high up on a mountain
guarded by ninjas and
protected by high walls of stone.

What a blessing it was
when I began to see this time
with the eye of my innermost self!

Now my feet are drunk with joy—
they can feel those sunlit paths
that heat them up so hot
they no longer can refrain from dancing!

— Mike Croghan, 2014, Revised 2023