





THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEMBERS'  
PERCEPTIONS OF SELF, THE CHURCH, AND  
THEIR LISTENING SKILLS

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by

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Abstract

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The investigative research conducted for this dissertation proposed to make an evaluation of the relationship of active listening and perceptions held by members of Trinity United Methodist Church.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not a relationship between perceptions and active listening exists. An assumption of the writer predicted such a relationship. In order to verify the relationship, several steps were followed to secure information and data relevant to the assumption: (a) a review of literature from the fields of psychology, organizational behavior and development, theology, and the Bible was undertaken to provide a foundation for understanding perception formation and active listening; (b) a study of the listening process and barriers to active listening was pursued; (c) a Perception Checklist and the Jones-Mohr Listening Test were administered to 30 church members to secure data relating to listening and perceptions; and (d) an evaluation of the data was made to determine the relationship between active listening and perceptions.

With the aid of the two instruments, some of the major conclusions reached were: (a) a knowledge of active listening can be acquired from organizational behavior and development;

(b) an understanding of perceptions can be acquired from psychology, theology, and the Scriptures; (c) laypersons are concerned over the low level of commitment/involvement by a greater percentage of the church membership; (d) laypersons desire to increase their listening skills for the purpose of bringing renewal and greater commitment to the local church.

The results of the Perception Checklist and the Jones-Mohr Listening Test revealed that the members can be viewed as "good" listeners and also hold "good" perceptions of the church, based on a ranking of "poor", "fair", "good", and "excellent" responses. The results also indicate a relationship between perceptions and active listening, although this cannot be stated conclusively. Further research must be undertaken to make any such conclusive statement.

The significance of this study for the future has demonstrated a need for (a) training members to develop further their listening skills; (b) strengthening the weaknesses in the local church's ministry, as revealed in the study; (c) incorporating a nurturing, shepherding program for all the members of the church; (d) improving listening skills in order to achieve an intentional ministry of outreach to church members and the unchurched of the community; and (e) developing a program with greater emphasis on the meaning of membership in The United Methodist Church.

## AUTHORIZATION

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Signed James R. Stewart

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In retrospect, the number of people who have given time, encouragement, and help to make this study possible is quite astounding.

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In addition, I want to publicly express my gratitude to Dr. David Thompson, faculty advisor, Dr. Donald Demaray,

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Finally, and most importantly, I want to publicly offer my deepest appreciation and love for my wife, Barbara, our daughter and son, Jennifer and Jay, for granting me countless hours in order to complete the D. Min. requirements. Without their constant encouragement and extreme patience, the completion of the program would not have been possible.



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## Chapter 1

### THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

#### The Statement of the Problem

This research proposes to evaluate the relationship between active listening and perceptions of self and the church among members of Trinity United Methodist Church.

#### The Sub-problems

1. The first sub-problem. The first sub-problem is to determine how accurately individuals listen as measured by the Jones-Mohr Listening Test.

2. The second sub-problem. The second sub-problem is to determine the members' perceptions of Trinity United Methodist Church.

3. The third sub-problem. The third sub-problem is to assess the relationship of active listening and perceptions as a means of fulfilling the meaning of membership in the local United Methodist church.

#### The Hypotheses

Rather than establishing hypotheses that would need proving, research questions were developed for guiding the author in this study. The following questions directed the author in obtaining information and data relevant to this study.

How well do church members exercise their listening skills? What can be determined about the way members perceive Trinity United Methodist Church? How do members perceive themselves? How can perceptions block or aid change for the church member? How can active listening facilitate the fulfillment of the meaning of membership in the local church?

### The Delimitations

The study is limited to members of Trinity United Methodist Church for the purpose of determining their present perceptions of the local church.

The study makes no attempt to determine the relationship of active listening and perceptions with the level of involvement in the local church. Such an attempt would go beyond the scope of this study.

### The Definition of Terms

Active Listening. Active listening occurs when the listener takes responsibility for understanding the content and feeling of what is said.

Perception. Perception is the view one individual holds of self, another person, or group of people based on observations, knowledge, feelings, and impressions.

Relationships. In the context of this Project/ Dissertation, relationships consist of the inter-relatedness between two or more individuals, or an individual

and God. Relationships foster an awareness of essential needs as well as a mutual discovery of potentials for change and growth.

Self-Disclosure. Self-disclosure consists of the individual's ability to talk truthfully and fully about oneself. The degree to which a person speaks openly with another dictates the extent to which that person gains self-understanding, thereby discovering his/her potential for change and growth.

Worship. Worship, ideally, consists in God's revealing his grace to his children, and their responding through the faith God has inspired. The responses of the individual to God's grace is through praise, prayer, preaching, study and the sacraments.

Participation. Participation, in the context of this study, is the degree of freedom and willingness of the individual to share in the life of the church for the purpose of improving his/her spiritual life. Participation in the church's ministry fosters and awareness of one's options which can contribute to change and growth, as well as fulfill the meaning of membership in the local church.

Inclusion. Inclusion refers to the individual's sense of belonging to and becoming actively involved in the church or any organization of the church which stresses acceptance, freedom, and the exercise of talents and gifts. Inclusion

contributes to choices which afford opportunities for change and involvement.

### Assumptions

The first assumption. The first assumption is that active listening helps reduce tensions so the listener can grasp the message of the communicator.

The second assumption. The second assumption is that an individual learns by engaging in active listening.

The third assumption. The third assumption is that active listening can assist an individual to set priorities which in turn allow change and growth to occur.

The fourth assumption. The fourth assumption is that perceptions of the church can strengthen or hinder the spiritual life of the church member.

The fifth assumption. The fifth assumption is that active listening and perceptions can affect the level of commitment and involvement of the church member.

The sixth assumption. The sixth assumption is that organizational behavior and development offer clues which contribute to the possibilities of greater involvement and commitment to the local church.

The seventh assumption. The seventh assumption is that the Bible, pastoral counseling, the Christian faith, and theology provide valuable insights which enable a church member to strengthen his/her level of commitment to Christ and the work of His Church.

## The Importance of the Study

The problem considered in this Project/Dissertation comes from two sources. First, during the 23 years of the writer's public ministry, there has been a growing awareness that a possible link exists between the individual's ability to listen actively and his/her perceptions of the church. Perceptions can be viewed as one determinant of the individual's commitment to the Kingdom of Christ and the level of involvement in the local church. Second, a goal established by the Congregational Reflection Group, as a requirement for the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary, increased the writer's desire to discern the relationship of active listening and perceptions of the church member. The Congregational Reflection Group's concern over the level of commitment by church members was given priority. To accomplish this goal, the Congregational Reflection Group felt an effort should be made to help people learn self-management (i.e., their time, conflict, stress, problem-solving, as well as communication and listening skills). Through self-management an individual can set priorities and discover the need for a greater degree of involvement. This raises the question of the relationship between active listening and perceptions of the church held by members of Trinity Church. This phase of the project was designed to enable the participants to recognize and remove obstacles which stand between him/her and the fulfillment of Christ's commission to be and do the work of the



church to the best of one's ability.

This study and project have importance to the writer as a means of enabling church members to fulfill their vows of church membership. A benefit to the congregation is the development of listening skills in order to deepen the level of the member's commitment to the church's ministry. An additional benefit of the Project/Dissertation will hopefully result in designing a program to help motivate people to listen actively in order to validate one's confession of Christ, although this is beyond the scope of this study.

An investigation of the Scriptures and an application of the truths contained therein to life situations is important. Such an investigation must be coupled with insights derived from current sciences, such as psychology and the field of organizational behavior and development, which underscore these basic truths.

### Methodology

The methodological approach taken in this Project/Dissertation is the descriptive (normative) survey. In order to obtain the data necessary, two instruments were used: the Jones-Mohr Listening Test, which helped in the evaluation of active listening on the part of the church members; and a Perception Checklist, which was designed to determine perceptions of the church population studied. (The factors given weight in the Perception Checklist were:

relationships, self-disclosure, worship and experience, participation, and inclusion - as previously defined).

The method of selecting participants was by randomization (selecting every eleventh name from the total church membership role). Randomization was chosen in the hopes that the characteristics of this group would approximate the characteristics of the total church membership. By selecting every eleventh name from the membership role, the result produced a list of 68 members from a total church membership of 749, with 30 members participating in the test and checklist. Randomization prevented a bias in the group selected for this study. A random sampling allowed a variation among the participants. The study group included: men/women, youth/middle age/older adults, married/single/divorced/widowed, active/inactive members, varying educational levels, as well as varying economic levels.

#### Major Sources of Information

The study of this problem was limited to the following resources: the Jones-Mohr Listening Test, a Perception Checklist, psychology, organizational behavior and development, pastoral counseling, the Bible, and theology.

The Jones-Mohr Listening Test was selected as an instrument to provide feedback on listening efficiency and to measure the effect of skill building in this area. This instrument affords: (1) immediate feedback on listening

accuracy; (2) motivation of individuals to work on listening skills; (3) a demonstration of the need for listening improvement in order to attain continued growth; and (4) a listening instrument for evaluation of the proposed problem undertaken in the Project/Dissertation. The advantages of this particular test are that it is brief, non-threatening, easy to administer and score, as well as being interesting and easily adaptable to the purpose of this Project/Dissertation.

A Perception Checklist was designed for the purpose of assessing the way members view Trinity United Methodist Church on the basis of relationships, self-disclosure, worship, experience, participation, and inclusion.

Psychology was chosen as a source of information because it is a systematic study of human nature and behavior. While conflict sometimes emerges within segments of the church concerning the use and application of psychology to Christian behavior, the value of its insights into human nature and behavior cannot be ignored. Due to the breadth of this field, this study is restricted primarily to behavior psychology and its impact upon the spiritual development of individuals.

Organizational behavior and development was chosen as a source of information in that this relatively new field provides a linkage between the secular and the sacred. Organizational behavior, as an evolving collection of philosophies, concepts, and techniques, has as its aim the improvement of the individual's performance by means of structured

interventions. As such, organizational behavior is derived more from the social than the biological and physical sciences. Organizational behavior provides techniques which can help motivate individuals to improve their listening skills as well as understand the obstructions to accurate, active listening.

Pastoral counseling was selected as it presents a valid case for the integration of psychology and theology.

### The Time Period of the Project/ Dissertation

The time period of this Project/Dissertation was broken into three intervals. Following completion of four courses at Asbury Theological Seminary, the local church formed a Congregational Reflection Group to determine the key problem needing to be addressed. After three sessions in early 1986, each session lasting approximately two hours, the group determined the need to lead members to a deeper level of commitment.

The second interval consisted of 10 "mini" workshops dealing with "How to Manage Yourself and Your Spiritual Life" (see Appendix A). Due to the availability of individuals and resources to carry out these ten sessions, the goal was set to begin this phase of the project by March 23, 1986, and conclude no later than June 8, 1986. These sessions were conducted, during the Sunday church school hour, at Trinity United Methodist Church, Bowling Green, Ohio, where the writer serves as senior pastor. These sessions utilized the knowledge and skills of the writer's "peer supervisor",

Dr. Dan Tomal, a consultant for Marathon Oil Company, who has conducted motivational seminars worldwide, as well as involvement by the writer.

The format for the 10 one-hour sessions emphasized group interaction, worksheets, films, discussions, self-assessment instruments. The agenda consisted of opening each session with prayer, utilizing a learning activity for the particular topic being considered during that hour, relating the activity to Scripture, and closing each session with prayer.

These 10 sessions were open to the entire membership at Trinity Church. Publicity for the sessions stressed that all people interested in learning "How to Manage Yourself and Your Spiritual Life" were encouraged to attend. The average attendance for the 10 sessions was 50, 33 of whom were present at at least 80 percent of the sessions.

Topics covered in the 10 sessions were: (1) Using Your Personality Style to Reduce Conflict in Life; (2) Understanding Your Life Values; (3) Improving Your Family Relationships Through Team Work; (4) How to Communicate and Listen to People; (5) Managing Stress in Life; (6) Personal Organization and Time Management; (7) Solving Problems in Life; (8) Dealing with Complainers; (9) How to Counsel People; and (10) Open for Concentration on Selected Topic.

While each of these sessions could have extended for a one- to two-day time period, efforts were intended more for an introduction to self-management as a way of further developing one's spiritual life. From these sessions, the

area chosen as vital for the work at Trinity Church was (a) communication and listening, with particular focus on the listening process, and (b) perceptions members have of Trinity Church and how these perceptions can affect the level of commitment/involvement in the local church.

The third interval was the administration of a Perception Checklist and the Jones-Mohr Listening Test, on July 15, 1987, for the purposes of securing data to be used in determining the relationship between active listening and perceptions of church members.

#### A Review of the Literature in the Related Fields

Pastoral counseling, psychology, organizational behavior and development, and theology are the four related fields selected as sources of information for this Project/Dissertation. Leading authors and their contributions in each of these fields are reviewed in this section.

#### Pastoral Counseling

In Psychology of Pastoral Care,<sup>1</sup> Paul E. Johnson reviews the principles of psychology, showing that religion and psychology are partners in making the church a healing community, and tells how pastoral psychology can be used to achieve an effective, well-rounded ministry. Johnson's chapter on responsive counseling is of particular interest

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<sup>1</sup>Paul E. Johnson, Psychology of Pastoral Care (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953).

and relevance to the concept of active listening and spiritual development.

Heije Faber and Ebel van der Schoot offer encouragement in their book, The Art of Pastoral Conversation,<sup>2</sup> as they point strongly to the role of conversation as a way of helping persons see themselves in the light of God's love. This book demonstrates the principles, theories, practices, and problems which occur in conversation. Such problems can obviously become blocks to involvement, as they retard or block the listening process.

Thomas Oden's book, Kerygma and Counseling,<sup>3</sup> is particularly helpful as he develops his assumption that there is a relationship between a psychotherapy of human self-disclosure and a theology of God's self-disclosure. His aim is to determine how the kerygma can illuminate the counseling process, thereby affording a deepening of one's spiritual life.

Robert A. Ball, in his book, The "I Feel" Formula,<sup>4</sup> builds a case for allowing others freedom to express themselves by an "I feel" communication pattern, as opposed to the "This is the way it is" pattern. In essence, Ball builds a case for the need of active listening, if one would be in a

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<sup>2</sup>Heije Faber and Ebel van der Schoot, The Art of Pastoral Conversation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965).

<sup>3</sup>Thomas C. Oden, Kerygma and Counseling (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966).

<sup>4</sup>Robert A. Ball, The "I Feel" Formula (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1977).

position of helping another identify any feelings or problems which may interfere with involvement and commitment - emotionally, psychologically, or spiritually.

In Competent to Counsel,<sup>5</sup> Jay Adams attempts to sketch preliminaries to Biblical counseling - accepting the Bible as the standard of all faith and practice, which addresses the need for faithful participation in the corporate Body of Christ.

Jay Adams also wrote Christian Living in the Home.<sup>6</sup> In this book, Adams' thrust is to check the erosion of the Christian's faith by urging careful application of scriptural principles. He indicates that communication must come first in order to build unity in one's life with God and with one another.

Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr., indicates in his book, The Marriage Builder,<sup>7</sup> that Christian growth generally is neither dramatic nor does it result in a rapidly changed life. Rather, Christian growth is a long, often difficult process. Communication, Crabb avers, is one building block for Christian growth and development.

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<sup>5</sup>Jay E. Adams, Competent to Counsel (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing company, 1970).

<sup>6</sup>Jay E. Adams, Christian Living in the Home (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972).

<sup>7</sup>Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr., The Marriage Builder (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982).



Edgar Draper makes a strong case for active listening in his book, Psychiatry and Pastoral Care.<sup>8</sup> In his work, Draper focuses on two primary aims: the examination of problems in relationships, and useable common sense principles and practices for both diagnosis of problems and the care extended to another person. At one point, Draper says the listener must decide early why he/she is listening. In other words, what is the goal and desired results for listening in the first place?

While Thomas W. Klink's work, Depth Perspectives in Pastoral Work,<sup>9</sup> is aimed at providing a basic approach to pastoral work, he points up the dynamics of depth perspectives which focus on man's inner struggle for identity and meaning. Through sensitivity to listening in depth, it becomes possible to assist another in change.

Harry A. DeWire, in his contribution to the Westminster Studies on Communication, makes it clear, in his book The Christian as Communicator,<sup>10</sup> that every member of Christ's body is to bear witness. The witness of which DeWire speaks

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<sup>8</sup>Edgar Draper, Psychiatry and Pastoral Care (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965).

<sup>9</sup>Thomas W. Klink, Depth Perspectives in Pastoral Work (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965).

<sup>10</sup>Harry A. DeWire, The Christian as Communicator (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961).

exceeds an invitation to "go to church with me"; rather, it is a reciprocal encounter between two persons in which the deeper levels of experience can be brought to light and shared. These reciprocal encounters (active listening) can produce a change in one another, especially when Christ is in the midst of such encounters.

A much needed book on the integration of pastoral care, leadership, and theology has been written by Thomas C. Oden, Pastoral Theology.<sup>11</sup> Oden develops clearly the need to grasp the classical Christian thinking as it relates to the practice of ministry by both clergy and laypersons. His approach is consistent and compatible with Christian faith and theology and has value for current needs expressed by people.

In an attempt to integrate psychology and theology, William T. Kirwan's work, Biblical Concepts for Christian Counseling,<sup>12</sup> describes with accuracy, the problems counselors see daily, and without apology gives a Christian perspective on ways to deal with those problems. Of considerable importance, as applied to active listening, is Kirwan's concept: knowing (mind) [cognition]; being (heart) [affect]; and doing (will) [volition]. The implication of

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<sup>11</sup>Thomas C. Oden, Pastoral Theology (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983).

<sup>12</sup>William T. Kirwan, Biblical Concepts for Christian Counseling (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984).

Kirwan's concept, as it relates to the study on active listening, is that by knowing (or being heard), that person then is in a position of changing or desiring for change to occur, and then is positioned for doing.

### Psychology

The study of listening as part of the communication process began with early studies conducted by Paul T. Rankin, as a basis for his doctoral dissertation. At the Ninth Annual Session of the Ohio State Educational Conference, Rankin presented his views, based on his early studies. In "Listening Ability",<sup>13</sup> Rankin said that listening is the most frequently used communication skill, since it comprises 42% of communication time, as compared with reading, talking, and writing. While the data were obtained from a small sample, the findings have been confirmed by later writers. Using a self-written test, Rankin surveyed the listening abilities of fifth and sixth grade children. After extensive analyses, Rankin concluded that reading and listening were closely associated, but that the correspondence was far from perfect.

According to Ralph Nichols and Thomas Lewis, the educational philosophy training in oral communication has

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<sup>13</sup>Paul T. Rankin. "Listening Ability." Proceedings of the Ohio State Educational Conference's Ninth Annual Session (Columbus: The Ohio State University, 1929).

stressed the importance of training for listening as well as training for speaking. In their book, Listening and Speaking,<sup>14</sup> Nichols and Lewis agree with this approach and believe the objective will be achieved best by coordinating the two skills. Nichols and Lewis emphasize the fact that oral communication is a two-way process. When it is not a two-way process, it is pure exhibitionism or display. The interest of the speaker must be in "getting through" to the receiver, and the interest of the listener must be in "accurate reception" of the message from the sender. This book is written on the premise that in the past too little attention has been given to the listening part of this dual process. Primary emphasis in the book is placed upon the importance of listening.

Nichols and Stevens believe their book Are You Listening?<sup>15</sup> is the first close analysis ever made of the oldest, the most used, and the most important element of interpersonal communication - listening. Throughout history listening has often been the sole medium of learning. By contrast, reading has served as a primary tool of learning for only a few hundred years, but even during this period it is entirely safe to say that more has been learned

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<sup>14</sup>Ralph Nichols and Thomas Lewis. Listening and Speaking (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Co., 1954).

<sup>15</sup>Ralph G. Nichols and Leonard A. Stevens. Are You Listening? (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957).

through oral than visual communication. Nichols and Stevens believe if we were to weigh our educational systems in terms of communication instruction, we would find that almost all of the formal attention is given to teaching reading and writing, some is given to speaking and almost none is paid to listening. Listening is a skill which can be improved through training and practice, just as can reading, writing, and speaking. This book is written to develop the reader's awareness of the importance of listening and to lead him/her to the kinds of aural experience that make for better understanding of what he/she hears.

The Awesome Power of the Listening Heart,<sup>16</sup> by John Drakeford, suggests the most important thing a person does is listening. Listening is the most underrated of the sensory experiences. Through listening, which is a multi-dimensional skill, information is gained from the world around us, and enables us to help and reach out to others, as well as discover God. Drakeford's book helps anyone who wishes to be launched on the venture of helping, influencing, and motivating others. John Drakeford speaks of the "listening heart" because the heart, in this instance, is associated with love - the source of all active listening. By developing listening skills, the individual gains a valuable educational tool for learning, as well as a resource for

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<sup>16</sup>John Drakeford. The Awesome Power of the Listening Heart (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982).

helping others. Drakeford discusses listening levels which are enumerated as: eye-listening, ear-listening, head-listening, hand-listening, tactile-listening, third-ear-listening, and body-listening. To be an effective, active listener the individual must master these levels of listening, thereby mastering the art of listening which subsequently results in change for both the listener and the one being listened to.

Dominick A. Barbara, a certified practicing psychologist, wrote on the subject How to Make People Listen to You.<sup>17</sup>

Barbara develops the idea of holistic listening, a process by which a person is able, in the words of Heraclitus, to listen to the essence of things. However, holistic listening is more than this. By involving the total organism, one achieves the ultimate in caring - listening at the deepest level, which involves more than mere content; it involves feeling - in essence a communion of soul to soul. The important contributions by Dominick Barbara are learning to listen with a purpose, how to avoid lethargic listening, as well as mastering the art of listening. In order to listen more effectively, emphasis must be placed on the elimination of the problems that interfere with efficient listening. To this extent, the listening skill can be learned by those individuals who are willing to work at developing the skill.

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<sup>17</sup> Dominick A. Barbara. How to Make People Listen to You (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1971).

To listen actively, one must have an alert mind and plenty of curiosity, sustained by many interests. The person who develops the habit of concentration and actively applies listening skills will listen more and better. By so doing, that person reaches out toward a clearer and deeper experiencing of self.

In his fine effort entitled The Awesome Power of the Listening Ear,<sup>18</sup> John Drakeford discusses once again mastering the art of listening. He proceeds, in part two of this book, to discuss the adventure of listening. The listener's finest hour comes when he/she hears the One who speaks through an inner voice. The goal, Drakeford asserts, is to hear (listen to) the authentic voice of God, which empowers the individual for change. By listening to the inner voice, each person can discover him/herself. Drakeford reminds us of the continuing theme of the Bible: men must listen if they are to know God. Jesus warned his followers many times over, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15), and Paul reminds us "faith comes by hearing" (Romans 10:17a). The person who really seeks to know and listen for the voice of God will have the experience of one of bygone days of whom it was said, "And thine ear shall hear a voice behind thee saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it'" (Isaiah 30:21b). To hear and to heed this voice, one embarks on the journey

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<sup>18</sup>John Drakeford. The Awesome Power of the Listening Ear (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1967).

of spiritual development, and can be sustained by the church. The requirement is the ability to listen actively to this inner voice (of God) and others who encourage us on the journey.

Larry Barker's book, Listening Behavior,<sup>19</sup> was prompted by several beliefs held by Barker. These beliefs include these presuppositions: (1) the listening process is taken for granted; (2) most people could be more effective listeners; and (3) the failure to listen often creates interpersonal problems. With these beliefs clearly in mind, Barker proceeds to develop several objectives: (1) to stress listening as a vital element in the communication process; (2) to attempt providing basic understanding of listening behavior; (3) to sensitize the individual to his/her own listening behavior; (4) to provide criteria by which to evaluate listening behavior; and (5) to actively help others improve listening skills and behaviors. While this book discusses listening principles in a non-technical manner, it does provide descriptive and experimental research in the area of listening to one another.

Insights on self-awareness, interpersonal communication, and personal growth comprise the major themes of John Powell, S.J., in Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?.<sup>20</sup> These

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<sup>19</sup>Larry L. Barker. Listening Behavior (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971).

<sup>20</sup>John Powell, S.J. Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am? (Allen, TX: Argus Communications, 1969).



valuable insights equip persons who entertain the desire to develop their own self-esteem as well as that of others and simultaneously improve relationships. Powell purports that people are often afraid to risk communication of their real self, for fear others might not like them. As a consequence of this fear of self-disclosure, we frequently avoid being honest with others as well as with ourself. Relationships progress only to the level we are willing to disclose to those around us. Only as we face our fears honestly and openly can we possibly grow to like ourself and trust that others will accept us as we are. The crux of the matter focuses upon the fact that personal growth comes through our relationship with others. Logically, therefore, spiritual growth results from a dynamic relationship with God, and that is contingent upon a willingness to be in communication with Him.

The Art of Counseling,<sup>21</sup> by Rollo May, though an older text, was an early exploration in the field of counseling. May, an early pioneer in counseling, contends that we serve as "guide", "counselor", and "friend" whenever we deal intimately with people. While counseling might be classified as an art, it remains that this art can be stimulated and developed. Though much has been contributed to the field of counseling, following the publication of May's book, yet his chapter on empathy laid the groundwork for much that has

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<sup>21</sup>Rollo May. The Art of Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1939).

evolved pertaining to active listening.

Seward Hiltner, a widely recognized authority on both the practical and theoretical aspects of counseling, in The Counselor in Counseling,<sup>22</sup> unequivocally states that if we change ourselves, we thereby change the potentialities in relationships, and at the same time we change the possibilities of helping others. Several chapters of this work are vital to all who would aspire to help others. These chapters stress the need for: (1) awareness of externals in the counseling process; (2) an attitude of being flexible while counseling; (3) concentration on what the other person is attempting to communicate; and (4) empathy with the counselee. The inculcation of these principles into the counseling process can assure success with those seeking our help.

A noted psychologist, Eugene Kennedy, states that most people often take their intimate problems to those persons closest at hand. In his book, On Becoming a Counselor,<sup>23</sup> Kennedy offers a basic guide for non-professional counselors, to enable them to respond to other people's problems with both compassion and intelligence. This is not a "how-to-do-it" book, but one which recognizes the basic strengths nonprofessionals possess - common sense, good judgment, and availability to others. In part one of his book, Kennedy stresses

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<sup>22</sup>Seward Hiltner. The Counselor in Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953).

<sup>23</sup>Eugene Kennedy. On Becoming a Counselor (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1977).

the importance of empathy - a way to become a participant-observer in helping others. The essence of this thrust begins with the understanding that the heart of counseling consists not in doing something "to" or "for" another but in experiencing something "with" the other. Following this pattern in counseling contacts, counselors - whether professional or non-professional - deepen their understanding not only of counseling but also life itself. Such an approach - participant-observer style - allows for growth on the part of both the counselor and counselee, which should be the goal of all counseling contacts.

The third chapter of Leona Tyler's book, The Work of the Counselor,<sup>24</sup> focuses on what transpires within the counseling encounter. Tyler states that the counseling process is a "meeting" of the persons involved, leading to a relationship growing out of such encounters. In order for a relationship to take place, three qualities are essential on the part of the counselor (listener): acceptance, sincerity, and understanding. Therefore, Tyler suggests, the essential components needed to be a good counselor (listener) are attitudes rather than skills. However, the basic skill required - one which can be learned by practice and discipline - is communication. Such a skill points out the necessity of responding not to

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<sup>24</sup>Leona E. Tyler. The Work of the Counselor (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, 1969).

content, but to feelings. Once again, empathy will be required when the goal or purpose of our listening becomes one of enabling persons with problems to find resolution for those problems.

Good listening skills are crucial to effective listening and helping, assert Leslie Borck and Stephen Fawcett in their book, Learning Counseling and Problem-Solving Skills.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, good listening is the foundation upon which to build an effective helping relationship. These two thoughts imply that listening is an "active" process by which the helper shows respect for and demonstrates interest in the person seeking help. Borck and Fawcett indicate three components of active listening: doing (nonverbal activity), saying (verbal activity), and observing (nonverbal activity). The chapter on how to listen actively presents examples, activities, and suggestions relative to this effective style of listening.

In Developmental Counseling,<sup>26</sup> Donald Blocher suggests that many times the counselor or helper becomes so pre-occupied with attempting to think of the "right" thing to "say" that he/she is rendered unable to concentrate on the more important task of "perceiving" significant aspects of

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<sup>25</sup>Leslie E. Borck and Stephen B. Fawcett. Learning Counseling and Problem-Solving Skills (New York: The Haworth Press, 1982).

<sup>26</sup>Donald A. Blocher. Developmental Counseling (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1966).

communication. Listening, which is a form of perception, becomes difficult due to the fact that many are conditioned to be "selective" listeners. Therefore, the task is to move from "selective" to "total" listening on the part of the listener. Such a task is often accomplished through involvement in actual interpersonal situations. Again, empathy tends to be the key for "total" listening.

Dr. M. Scott Peck, a practicing psychiatrist, drawing from experience in his professional practice, asserts that spiritual growth is a long journey. In his book, The Road Less Travelled,<sup>27</sup> Peck contends that psychotherapy can be helpful in a larger percentage of cases, but is, nevertheless, inevitably superficial. Peck insists that one can make no distinction between the achievement of mental health and the achievement of spiritual growth - mind and spirit are basically the same. Suffering through problems enables the individual to attain a higher level of self-understanding. Problems within a person's life present the possibilities for mental and spiritual growth. The solution of problems, and consequently setting the stage for growth, comes through love - love of self and love of others as learned from God through His love for all people. Love is an act of the will. Will implies choice. Therefore, to exert self in the cause of spiritual growth, one has "chosen" to do so.

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<sup>27</sup>Dr. M. Scott Peck. The Road Less Travelled (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1978).

## Organizational Behavior and Development

A chapter entitled "Helping Skills for Understanding", from The Helping Relationship: Process and Skills,<sup>28</sup> by Lawrence Brammer, focuses on techniques which can promote understanding both of self and others, by developing listening skills, through "attending", "paraphrasing", "clarifying", and "perception checking". While listening at first glance implies a passive act, it actually involves a very active process by responding to total messages. In brief, Brammer believes active listening necessitates a kind of total perceptiveness which was best described by Reik (1948) as "listening with the third ear". Listening skills are vital to one who would help another in the solution of problems, thereby growing in his/her independent identities.

In unit nine of Joseph DeVito's book, Communicology: An Introduction to the Study of Communication,<sup>29</sup> emphasis is placed on the importance of listening, obstacles to effective listening, and guides to effective listening. Based on studies on listening, the average person spends as much as 42% of each day in listening. Due to the crucial role of listening, the need to become more effective and more effi-

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<sup>28</sup>Lawrence M. Brammer. The Helping Relationship: Process and Skills (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973).

<sup>29</sup>Joseph A. DeVito. Communicology: An Introduction to the Study of Communication (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

cient in this activity should be obvious. While listening is not easy, with time and energy it is possible to become a more effective listener. DeVito contends that listening can be made easier, more pleasant, and more efficient if some obstacles or barriers are eliminated. Thus, DeVito maintains that one's listening ability can be improved.

Robert Carkhuff, in The Art of Helping,<sup>30</sup> a book of practical suggestions for listening to and helping others, emphasizes the importance of "human processing". By "processing", Carkhuff indicates the requirements consist of knowing where an individual is in relation to an experience, understanding where the individual wants or needs to be, and the action required to get where the individual wants to be. Briefly stated, processing involves: exploring, understanding, and acting. Active listening becomes one vehicle that can be employed in this process - an invaluable vehicle. The person who actively listens to another, therefore, must assist the helpee explore where he/she is in order to understand where he/she desires to be, and how this transition becomes possible.

Richard Diedrich and Allan Dye, stressing the fact that listening is the most important single function an individual performs, offer in their book, Group Processes: Purposes,

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<sup>30</sup>Robert R. Carkhuff. The Art of Helping (5th ed.) (Amherst, MA: Human Resource Development Press, Inc., 1983).

Processes, and Outcomes,<sup>31</sup> guidelines for dramatically improving communication. While this book is oriented to groups, the principles set forth can be transferred to listening on a one-to-one basis. Two vital issues are addressed: one being a willingness to "want" to understand how the helpee views his/her situation, and the other stressing a willingness to accept the helpee as he/she is. Proceeding from this bias, the authors elaborate on the functions of listening: what is meant by listening, the risks involved in listening, and the conveyance of acceptance of the other in listening.

Paul G. Friedman, Listening Processes: Attention, Understanding, Evaluation,<sup>32</sup> says the ability to listen is often taken for granted. Listening is an essential, yet elusive, process. Most generally, people mistake hearing for listening. Friedman maintains the key element which differentiates listening from hearing is "attentiveness". This book provides many insights into the ways communication goes astray and how it can be optimized. The value of Friedman's material is that it offers guidelines which can render the listener more effective - viz., how to minimize the forces which can distort listening and how to maximize those forces which will

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<sup>31</sup>Richard C. Diedrich and H. Allan Dye. Group Processes: Purposes, Processes, and Outcomes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972).

<sup>32</sup>Paul G. Friedman. Listening Processes: Attention, Understanding, Evaluation (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association of the United States, 1978).



enhance listening.

Communicating a readiness to respond to a seeker and communicating understanding comprise dual dimensions which Stanley Lindquist elaborates upon in two of his chapters, relevant to listening and helping, in his book, Action Helping Skills.<sup>33</sup> The first helping skill suggests "active listening", while the second advances the role "empathy" plays in one's attempt to be a helper. Effective listening occurs when the listener employs both aspects of communication.

Essential for good communication to take place, the listener must develop the skill of listening between the lines of conversation. Jesse Nirenberg's book, Getting Through to People,<sup>34</sup> offers insights into explicit messages (through the meaning of words) and implicit messages (feelings of the person at a given moment). Discerning the gap between the explicit and the implicit messages enables the listener actually to listen between the lines (or getting at the intentions of the seeker). Nirenberg elaborates upon five interpersonal operations: (1) building up one's self; (2) attacking others; (3) making demands; (4) controlling; and (5) expressing love. These five operations comprise implicit communication and are vitally a part of total,

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<sup>33</sup>Stanley E. Lindquist, Action Helping Skills (Fresno, CA: Link-Care Foundation Press, 1976).

<sup>34</sup>Jesse S. Nirenberg, Getting Through to People (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

active listening.

Enumerating four types of communication (verbal, oral, visual, and numerical), Gordon Wells proceeds to discuss each type in depth in his book, How to Communicate.<sup>35</sup> The crux of all types of communication lies in both the receiving and understanding of the message intended by the sender. In addition, for any communication to be worth while, it must have a purpose. Wells contends the purpose of communication is always persuasion - an attempt to influence the recipient. Whether this is the sole purpose of communication or not, much valuable information is presented by Wells which merits consideration if one wishes to grasp the intent of communication - the passing of a message from one person to another.

While Allan Glatthorn and Herbert Adams' book, Listening Your Way to Management Success,<sup>36</sup> has been written with managers in mind, the transference of concepts to one-on-one listening would not distort or erode the value of these principles. Since one is not born with the ability to pay attention, analyze, or respond empathically, listening skills can be learned. The goal of Glatthorn and Adams is that of assisting people to learn how to listen critically, analytically, and creatively in both individual as well as

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<sup>35</sup>Gordon Wells. How to Communicate (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1978).

<sup>36</sup>Allan A. Glatthorn and Herbert R. Adams. Listening Your Way to Management Success (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1983).

group interactions. Key issues addressed in this book, which are germane to this study, focus on listening as it relates to: understanding the message being communicated, problem-solving, and responding to differences.

Thomas Banville's reason for writing his book, How to Listen - How to Be Heard,<sup>37</sup> was prompted by the realization that he was not as good a listener as he should be. Therefore, in seeking ways of improving his own listening skills, Banville's desire is to share his findings with others. The main thrust of this book is discovering the key to more effective listening. Three assumptions, on the part of Banville, form the springboard of his discussion. These three assumptions are critical to effective, honest, active listening. They are: (1) an assumption of what is real; (2) assumptions concerning one's value system; and (3) the assumption of how things could be and the possibilities for personal change. Active listening involves "practice" - the extent to which the techniques and principles, specified by Banville, are employed daily will determine the amount of personal growth enjoyed by the individual.

### Theology

Emerson Colaw, who served on the Theological Study Commission on Doctrinal Standards of The United Methodist

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<sup>37</sup>Thomas G. Banville. How to Listen - How to Be Heard (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1978).

Church, began an effort to assist his congregation to study the Doctrinal Statement in small groups, resulting in the writing of Beliefs of a United Methodist Christian.<sup>38</sup> As Dr. Colaw relates, this appears to be a fruitful method of study, reflection, and Christian growth. The aim of the book is to stimulate pastors, congregations, and individuals to become involved in the task of theologizing within The United Methodist tradition. To take this task seriously could lead to a great awakening of the spirit-filled and spirit-led life.

In his book, Meet The Methodists,<sup>39</sup> Charles L. Allen addresses the questions: Who are the Methodists? and What does it mean to be a Methodist today? Meet The Methodists presents a clear and concise explanation of the basic beliefs of United Methodists. Allen shows how these beliefs affect church stewardship, education, Sunday schools, reading and publishing, social and political actions, structure, and world missions. In addition, Allen introduces the reader to The United Methodist Church - what it is and why it exists. By exploring church history and explaining how the church evolved out of the thought and ministry of John Wesley, Charles Allen stimulates an understanding of and an appreciation for The United Methodist Church.

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<sup>38</sup>Emerson Colaw. Beliefs of a United Methodist Christian (Nashville: Tidings, 1972).

<sup>39</sup>Charles L. Allen. Meet The Methodists (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986).

Doorways to Spiritual Living,<sup>40</sup> by Paul W. Milhouse, is a discussion of spiritual living in terms readily grasped by the reader. A special feature of Milhouse's book is a series of suggestions for personal discipline that translates thought into action and leads the reader through doorways to spiritual living. The author brings together insights, interpretations, and directives which help the reader to achieve a more intelligent understanding and deeper appreciation of spirituality. The ultimate doorway, according to Milhouse, leads into the sanctuary of the Spirit. Into this sanctuary people need to come in order to find spiritual life.

F. Gerald Ensley, in his book, Persons Can Change,<sup>41</sup> presents a case for the possibilities that people CAN change and that persons DO change. Ensley takes issue with contemporary opinion which states that people are determined by forces within and without and that real change is illusory. Ensley shows how Christian experience has effected change and how anyone with the help of God has the power to change him/herself into the likeness of his/her idea. Sharing his concern with change for the better, Ensley attempts to specify the conditions of change; namely, (1) One must desire to be different; (2) He/She must have faith in the possibility of

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<sup>40</sup>Paul W. Milhouse. Doorways to Spiritual Living (Dayton, OH: The Otterbein Press, 1950).

<sup>41</sup>F. Gerald Ensley. Persons Can Change (Nashville: Graded Press, 1963).

change; (3) He/She must see the good along lines prescribed by reality; (4) He/She must habitually expose him/herself to the idea; and (5) He/She must associate with good persons. By meeting all these conditions, Gerald Ensley maintains that the individual will be able to realize a better way for him/herself and for the world in which he/she lives.

In his writing, Why Conservative Churches are Growing,<sup>42</sup> Dean M. Kelley draws attention to the fact that man is a being who needs to make sense out of experience. The task of religion is to provide this meaning and purpose, to give character and direction to the forces which influence one's destiny, according to Kelley. The dynamics of meaning, Kelley believes, explain why people come together in closely-knit religious groups that flourish even in the face of social and political hostility. This book challenges the mainline churches to return from peripheral concerns and recover their essential task: providing the meaning that makes life whole.

Discipleship for the 70's,<sup>43</sup> by Ewart G. Watts, attempts to explain the new and broadened definition of the meaning of church membership, adopted by the Uniting Conference of The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church to form The United Methodist Church in 1968.

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<sup>42</sup>Dean M. Kelley, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972).

<sup>43</sup>Ewart G. Watts, Discipleship for the 70's (Nashville: Tidings, 1971).

Big Christian Ideas,<sup>44</sup> by Ronn Kerr, is an attempt to look at a rather broad range of Christian beliefs. All of these beliefs are affirmed by a substantial group of Christians at some time in our history. The majority of the ideas discussed in this book are firmly rooted in each person's doctrinal tradition, because, contrary to popular mythology, Christians from widely differing groups have considerably more beliefs in common than in dispute.

Kenneth W. Copeland offers the reader of his book, A Primer of Beliefs for United Methodist Laymen,<sup>45</sup> the opportunity to re-examine and more clearly understand the basic Christian doctrines. Copeland believes that faith and conduct affect each other and must be based on Christian belief. The book represents a sincere attempt by Copeland, a Bishop of The United Methodist Church, to examine the roots of our Christian faith and to speak to them in non-technical language. This book serves as a brief introduction to those foundations of our faith which concern Christian salvation and Christian conduct.

Millard J. Miller emphasizes in Our Church: A Guide Toward Meaningful Membership,<sup>46</sup> the need for religious instruc-

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<sup>44</sup>Ronn Kerr. Big Christian Ideas (Nashville: Ronn Kerr Associates).

<sup>45</sup>Kenneth W. Copeland. A Primer of Beliefs for United Methodist Laymen (Nashville: Tidings, 1959).

<sup>46</sup>Millard J. Miller. Our Church: A Guide Toward Meaningful Membership (Dayton, OH: The Board of Christian Education of The Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1964).

tion for those seeking membership into the local church. Miller believes that the manner in which people accept their membership in the church will determine whether the hunger for spiritual renewal will become an effective movement. The purpose of this book is found in its use with church membership classes. Miller keeps in mind two groups of adult readers: (1) The host of people who want the better life for themselves and their families, but who have not yet realized what church membership can mean; and (2) Present members of the church, who have perhaps lost their first enthusiasm for the church, or who have never taken the time to consider the full implication of church membership.

In I Believe,<sup>47</sup> Gerald Kennedy deals with the questions: What can we believe - and why? What can we count on? What is the use of striving for, as the poet says, "a faith that will not shrink, tho' pressed by every foe"? Kennedy offers inspiration to those who would seek a better knowledge of what the spiritual life is and how we can live it. He points out that the first step is acquiring a belief in God. When we have proceeded far enough to say "I believe in God", we stand at the beginning of life's greatest adventure.

The Practice of Evangelism,<sup>48</sup> by Bryan Green, is written

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<sup>47</sup>Gerald Kennedy. I Believe (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958).

<sup>48</sup>Bryan Green. The Practice of Evangelism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951).



for practical purposes and based on thirty years of experience. Mr. Green deals with the many aspects of evangelism: conversion and how it happens; the place of the local church as a center; evangelistic preaching - what it is and how to do it; personal work; mass meetings; publicity; and co-operating with other denominations in an evangelistic mission. Bryan Green addresses the need for evangelism as a major priority of the church in the hopes of re-awaking the Church and Christians to their primary responsibility. By putting the truths and methods into practice, as suggested by Bryan Green, the Church will be more consecrated to Her Master and more relevant to the pressing needs of mankind.

Gordon Cosby's book, Handbook for Mission Groups,<sup>49</sup> is written from the perspective of concepts and principles of ministry which have evolved over more than 40 years. Cosby believes that by putting these principles into practice, groups can be the life of the church, not its death. Included in the book are examples of some creative ways spiritual disciplines are maintained: spiritual autobiographies, journals which chart the member's progress in the Christian life, and letters of accountability which keep an honest track of commitment and achievement.

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<sup>49</sup>Gordon Cosby. Handbook for Mission Groups (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1975).

## Chapter 2

### THE LISTENING PROCESS

The old truism appears obvious, yet often overlooked, that listening is not a passive activity. Some instances may give the impression that the listener (though "active" in the sense of undergoing changes, in reality) is a "passive" instrument in the hands of the skilled communicator. However, upon closer examination, a different picture emerges. The listener plays a more active role in determining both the nature and the outcome of the communicative encounter.

The presence of a message receiver does not guarantee successful communication. Oral communication requires an active listener who internalizes and evaluates the message so the speaker achieves his/her communication objective.

This chapter will address (1) the importance of listening, (2) the necessity of developing the ability to listen, (3) the role of listening within an individual's life, (4) viewing communication as dialogue, (5) the need to listen for content, emotion, and understanding, and (6) the listening process.

#### The Importance of Listening

Several studies indicate the average individual spends most of his/her communication time in listening. People learn more through the process of listening than any other

means of communication.<sup>1</sup>

Rankin conducted one of the earliest studies in 1929.<sup>2</sup> To secure data relevant to the importance of listening, he selected adults from a variety of occupations. The subjects recorded, at 15 minute intervals, the approximate amount of time spent in the basic 4 types of verbal communication: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.<sup>3</sup> The results showed that 70 percent of the day was spent in one or more of the 4 types of communication. Rankin's study revealed these percentages:<sup>4</sup>

Type of verbal communication	Percentage
Listening	42%
Talking	32%
Reading	15%
Writing	11%

Rankin concluded that among the adults tested listening is the most frequently used form of verbal communication during the average day.

Additional studies confirm the findings of Rankin. Bird (1953) conducted an investigation of verbal communica-

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<sup>1</sup>P. Rankin. "Listening Ability." Proceedings of the Ohio State Educational Conference's Ninth Annual Session (Columbus: The Ohio State University, 1929), pp. 172-83.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

tion among students in a women's college.<sup>5</sup> He concluded that an average day consumed 42 percent of their verbal communication time.<sup>6</sup> A similar study conducted by Breiter (1957) among housewives revealed the average housewife spends 48 percent of her verbal communication time in listening.<sup>7</sup>

Ralph G. Nichols and Leonard A. Stevens tested the ability of people to understand and remember what they hear. Using the University of Minnesota to conduct their test, they examined the listening ability of several thousand students and hundreds of business and professional people in adult education courses. Their research consisted of short talks given by faculty members followed by a carefully constructed test designed to measure the subject's comprehension and retention of materials aurally received. The average person remembered about half of what was heard.<sup>8</sup>

Further research conducted at Florida State University shows the average listener remembers approximately 25 percent

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<sup>5</sup>D. Bird. "Teaching Listening Comprehension," Journal of Communication, November, 1953: No. 3, pp. 127-30.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>L. Breiter. "Research in Listening and Its Importance to Literature." Unpublished Master's Thesis, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, New York, 1957.

<sup>8</sup>Ralph G. Nichols and Leonard A. Stevens. Are You Listening? (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957), p. 4.

of what was said two months after listening to a speaker.<sup>9</sup>

These studies point out two weaknesses in listening. First, people do not listen actively. Second, people need training to listen actively. Failure to listen actively may result from investing too little time or effort in constructive listening and a high degree of involvement with one's personal needs and sensitivities that he/she fails to understand or listen to others.

The studies cited present several conclusions. First, listening is an important form of verbal communication in which an individual engages. Second, individuals are required to listen frequently. Third, it is advantageous to possess effective listening skills for daily life and meet the listening demands which occur daily.<sup>10</sup>

Contrary to common conception, listening is an "active" rather than a "passive" process. Listening does not just happen. The individual makes listening happen. Listening requires energy and a commitment to participate in an often difficult effort.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Dominick A. Barbara. How to Make People Listen to You (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1971), p. 14.

<sup>10</sup>Larry L. Barker. Listening Behavior (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 5.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

### The Ability to Listen

There is Scriptural support (Matthew 10:19) for the assumption that a person open to the directing of the Holy Spirit will be shown what to say and when to say it.<sup>12</sup>

Many people view hearing and listening as synonyms. These are very different processes. Hearing describes the physiological ability to translate a sound wave into a neural current which proceeds to the brain. The brain receives the neural current. Through the process of selection, organization, comprehension, interpretation, and evaluation, the message is decoded. Listening describes the sorting out process by which the individual chooses and decides which stimuli will be given attention.<sup>13</sup> This selective process of the brain constitutes the distinction between hearing and listening.

Listening may be thought to fall along a bipolar continuum. One end of the spectrum (see Figure 1) represents the mental state characterized by receptivity to others, alertness to external stimuli, acceptance of the message, and

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<sup>12</sup>Harry A. DeWire. The Christian as Communicator (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 64.

<sup>13</sup>John Drakeford. The Awesome Power of the Listening Heart (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), p. 146.

openness to input.<sup>14</sup> The key element is "attentiveness", i.e., maintaining a focus on the speaker and at the same time on the message being transmitted. The listener needs to be attentive, learn how to listen, and be sensitive to the demands of the moment. An entire relationship can be won or lost in this first gesture.<sup>15</sup> In almost all normal interpersonal contacts, the eyes function before the ear. While the ears are listening for voices, the eyes are already engaged in listening.<sup>16</sup>

The middle of the continuum represents the listener actively listening and organizing the material being received. Mentally the listener attempts to distinguish information essential to the message being transmitted by the speaker, as well as relevant information, and how the concepts being presented interrelate. The key element is understanding the message.

At the opposite end of the continuum, the listener weighs the message against his/her personal beliefs, questions the speaker's motives, challenges the ideas presented, suspects the validity of the message, holds the speaker's ideas up to standards of excellence, thinks how the message could be im-

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<sup>14</sup>Paul G. Friedman. Listening Processes: Attention, Understanding, Evaluation (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1978), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>DeWire, p. 68.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

proved, and attempts to evaluate what is being said.

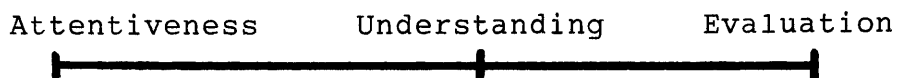


Figure 1

Bipolar Continuum  
of Listening

Attentiveness, understanding, and evaluation can occur sequentially, cumulatively, and often concurrently.<sup>17</sup> The listener must pay attention to a message, try to understand it, and proceed to evaluate it. If the message is familiar and uncontroversial, the listener may be mostly attentive. If the message contains pieces of new information not questioned or challenged, the listener will seek understanding. If the message deals with values, opinions, or other topics which create differences between the speaker and the listener, the listener will spend the time differential between the rate of speech and the rate of comprehension in an evaluative process.

Listening is an essential but elusive process which occurs internally. The ability to listen is significant and can be learned. To achieve the ability to listen, each individual must try to improve his/her habits and skills as a good listener, realizing improvements in the listening ability can change that individual's life.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Friedman, loc. cit.

<sup>18</sup>Lyman K. Steil, et al. Listening: It Can Change Your Life (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1983), p. 2.



Few people realize how much time is spent in listening, the need to develop the listening ability, and how much it costs them. Fewer individuals comprehend how important listening can be to them economically, socially, and in terms of self-fulfillment.<sup>19</sup>

Many people believe listening comes naturally, that the listening ability is not a skill and is a passive activity requiring no training. However, it is important to remember that listening is not easy. Listening, one of the most difficult skills an individual must master,<sup>20</sup> requires determination, time, energy, and discipline.<sup>21</sup>

#### The Role of Listening

Based on previously cited studies, the fact remains undeniable: an individual spends a great deal of time listening. Whether effective and efficient listening takes place is another matter. Many people do not feel the necessity of improving their listening or that it might even be possible for improvement to be made. Although most of us are relatively poor listeners, our listening behavior could be made more effective and efficient.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Drakeford, p. 147.

<sup>21</sup>Joseph A. DeVito. Communicology: An Introduction to the Study of Communication (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1978), p. 145.

Drakeford suggests listening is the most underrated of all the sensory experiences of the individual.<sup>22</sup> One reason is the failure of most people to appreciate the many facets of listening. Listening is a multidimensional skill.<sup>23</sup> Through this skill, the individual gains information from the world around, is able to help and reach out to others in many ways, and in the most elevated of uses discovers God.<sup>24</sup> Listening is the supreme communication skill, the key to conversation, the primary motivational technique. For these reasons the role of listening must not be overlooked.

What makes listening so difficult? Active listening requires the individual to focus all of his/her attention on someone else. Thus, listening may be the most unselfish of all activities. It starts with Jesus' difficult command to His followers, a person should deny self (Matthew 16:24).

Listening is an art. There is no easy pathway to achieve the noble goal of effective listening. Accepting the proposition that listening is an art, the individual must realize listening requires as much time, effort, and perseverance as painting, ballet, music, or any other of the art forms.<sup>25</sup>

To become a better listener, the listener must keep

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<sup>22</sup>Drakeford, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

several important ideas clearly in mind. First, before effective communication can occur between the speaker and the listener, the listener must remember a sympathetic and understanding rapport be present. To gain knowledge and understanding from another person, the listener must realize what he/she hopes to achieve depends upon his/her ability to verbalize the thoughts, wishes, and feelings of the speaker. Otherwise real communication between two individuals, or a measure of genuine relatedness between two persons, becomes difficult if there is a lack of desire present for genuine communion or concern for the other individual. Acceptance of the speaker is only the beginning point in communication. There must be complete acceptance of the other person as he/she is and a relinquishment of any preconceived image of the speaker as created in the mind of the listener for communication to continue.<sup>26</sup>

Second, communication becomes most effective as the listener sees and listens to the speaker realistically. The speaker must be seen as a unique personality with beliefs, thoughts, and wishes of his/her own, with capacities for thinking and experiencing which can change, grow, develop into something new and stimulating. Genuine understanding depends on an eagerness to affirm the integrity of the other.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Barbara, p. 41.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

Third, when listening to others, the listener must exert effort to strive toward mutual communication and understanding.<sup>28</sup> Real communication occurs between two individuals when a lack of consciousness of who is talking and who is listening is present.<sup>29</sup> Both individuals involved in this process become lost in the total communicative atmosphere. Through relaxation, the development of closer feelings with each other, and affording each other free verbal intercourse, the productivity of positive communication reaches its highest peak.<sup>30</sup> Listening becomes highly selective as both become more aware and attuned to the essence of the facts or situation at hand. Through this active process both the speaker and the listener reach mutual levels of agreement where each favorably influences the other. When such a level of communication occurs, both individuals leave the situation wiser and healthier.

Listening with meaning involves a constant endeavor to gain an ever-increasing awareness and understanding of self and the other. Self-knowledge does not become an aim in itself but rather a means of liberating the forces of spontaneous growth, which is the goal of active communication and listening.<sup>31</sup> Active listening creates possibilities for

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

growth within self and the development of love and concern for the other.

Fourth, active listening demands both individuals define the message in mutual terms. The words used in expression of thought should be simple, clear, and concise. Abstract jargon will only lead to confusion and misunderstanding.

fifth, to become a better listener, one must not only make the effort of listening to the actual words expressed by the other person, but also attempt to go beyond the words in an effort to explore what the words really attempt to convey. One proven way to facilitate this process could be asking questions when in doubt - questions which are alive, curious, inquisitive, promoting, and growth-producing. This approach stimulates greater interest and attention as well as encourages better self-expression on the part of the speaker.

Finally, to be an effective listener and help others listen to us, there must be active participation in the whole process. This means not only working just through our ears, but also responding holistically with complete hearing capacity and total inner perceptions.<sup>32</sup> Active listening involves the need to be fully attentive and awake, alert every minute, in order to remove distractions and screen

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

out inner prejudices, preconceived notions, and faulty misconceptions. Active listening means being active in thought and feeling, as well as with one's eyes and ears in order to avoid mental inertia. Active listening means being open and receptive to others. Keeping all this in mind, the listener as well as the speaker will grow healthy as a human being. The result of active listening is the arrival at a sustained level of mutual and truthful communication.

#### Viewing Communication as Dialogue

Many people take the view that communication is a means of getting a message across to another person. Such a concept tends to infer that spoken communication implies a one-way flow, i.e., from one person to another, with the primary emphasis on the transferring of a message from one mind to another.<sup>33</sup>

Dialogue, which comes from the same Greek word as dialectic,<sup>34</sup> literally means a conversation between two or more persons and may be viewed as the art of critical examination into the truth of a given opinion. In the early English, dialectic was a synonym for logic as applied to formal rhetorical reasoning. In later philosophy, the term began to take on various shades of meaning which still color its us-

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<sup>33</sup>John Adair. The Skills of Leadership (New York: Nichols Publishing Company, 1984), p. 154.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

age in our time. Hegel (1770-1831) applied the word dialectic to the process of thought by which mutually contradictory principles of science, when employed on objects beyond the limits of sensory experience (e.g., the soul, the world, God), are seen to merge themselves into a higher truth which comprehends them.<sup>35</sup> Thus we may employ the dialectic method as being a critical inquiry into truth, one in which a dialogue between apparently conflicting views is more appropriate than a reflective soliloquy by a lone thinker.<sup>36</sup>

With this approach in mind, a dialogue can be viewed as good conversation: two persons face-to-face, talking and listening to each other, perhaps using gestures and signs in order to communicate a message. Adair suggests seven characteristics of good conversation. Conversation is (1) face-to-face, (2) a two-way process, (3) informal, (4) sincere and open, (5) adapted to the situation in which it takes place, (6) constitutes a means to an end and not an end in itself, and (7) desired and enjoyable.<sup>37</sup>

Listening for Content, Emotion, and Understanding

Attention is required for the listener to be receptive to a message. The attention span of individuals varies, but

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

generally speaking few people can attend to a single stimulus more than 20 seconds without shifting focus.<sup>38</sup> The shift can be toward another element within the parameters of the message content, to an associated thought which has been brought to mind by the message, or to something entirely unrelated to the message.

Whether a listener stays with the content of the message depends upon the inner needs, values, and aspects of the message itself. Listening will be enhanced when the message is relevant to the listener's life interests or when the message arouses an interest the listener wishes to have satisfied.

The tendency is to turn attention away from the message when the message proves disturbing to the listener. While there is not much that can be done about the listener's inner state, external conditions can be manipulated in order to increase the amount of attention given the message. The background or setting can serve to enhance the focus of attention desired. The concreteness of the message can affect the listener's attention. Concreteness is the specificity with which we treat the other person's experiences. We are specific only in regard to attending to the other's needs. Gradually, we become more specific as the other

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<sup>38</sup>Friedman, p. 9.



person explores his/her experiences.<sup>39</sup>

There may be times the listener becomes less concerned with the content of the message than with accurately perceiving factors about the speaker: the kind of person the speaker is, the state of relationship between speaker and listener, how the speaker feels at the moment. These factors are often called the maintenance level of the interaction.<sup>40</sup> This process begins with two individuals making contact, forming first impressions, and moving on to become acquainted. These events occur at the initial stage of a relationship, the point at which paying attention to each other is pre-eminent in the listening process. Individuals bring emotional and relationship needs with them which requires a degree of satisfaction. These needs can be classified as inclusion, affection, and control.

Upon first encounter, people are listening to each other to determine how likely it is their own needs will be met and how adequately they can meet the needs of others in following relationships.

Several methods can be used to ascertain how effective the present and future encounters will be. The methods

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<sup>39</sup>Robert R. Carkhuff. The Art of Helping 5th ed. (Amherst, MA: Human Resource Development Press, Inc., 1983), p. 25.

<sup>40</sup>Friedman, p. 14.

include observation of the person interacting with others, observing an individual in various types of social settings where a variety of social behaviors are called for, asking others who have had previous contact with the person about him/her, and the use of various strategies in face-to-face interaction to learn more information about the person (such as asking questions, sharing of opinions, revealing things about oneself).

Caution must be exercised in the formation of first impressions. First impressions can be distorted when assuming the other person is similar to oneself. This is referred to as projection. Should the assumption be made that the other person has similar features as oneself, this process is known as stereotyping.

The danger of initial impressions is that they can color later impressions. Two factors give first impressions a positive tint: similarity and attractiveness. Several studies indicate that a speaker and a listener with similar backgrounds, morals, attitudes, and appearance are attractive to each other. These similarities enhance the possibilities of interpersonal communication.<sup>41</sup> Similar characteristics make for better understanding and lead to a belief that a greater level of appreciation will be present.

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

The response given others is important since subsequent behavior by both the speaker and listener may be affected by it. How people are viewed affects future treatment of that individual which also affects how the individual sees him/herself and how he/she will perform. This phenomenon is called the pygmalion effect or the self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>42</sup>

A second concern involves anticipating factors which will affect others' perception, and then adapting to make the perception as positive as possible. This type of perception can lead to putting on masks or facades in order to look good in the eyes of others, which leads to false, manipulative role playing. Role playing creates several problems. It may result in confusing the communication process, leading to disappointment, perhaps inducing conflict as the relationship progresses, and placing a restriction upon the range of behaviors of the individuals.

The combination of listening for content and emotions enhances the communication process and achieving the goal of listening for understanding. Communication of information begins when an idea or an image arises in the mind of a speaker which he/she wants to share with another person. The successful completion of communication happens when the listener has interpreted or decoded the message and possesses

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

a mental image which is similar to that held by the speaker.

Misunderstandings occur for a variety of reasons. Symbols can be misinterpreted, patterns of organization can become distorted, and styles of presentation can be ill-suited to the cognitive habits of persons.<sup>43</sup> The hope for the listener is to grasp what the speaker is actually thinking and attempting to convey. Any attempt at mind reading could prove inaccurate.

In order to minimize misunderstandings, which often occur in communication, it is important to use very concrete terms, sometimes be redundant, and ask questions regarding the perceived meaning.<sup>44</sup> The responsibility for an accurate transmission of a message rests with both the listener and the speaker. However, should the listener fail in the overall approach to processing information the ability to listen will be seriously affected.

Friedman suggests several factors to be taken into account to assure that one is listening for the purpose of understanding the speaker. The factors enumerated by Friedman include: recognition of the speaker as a worthwhile human being, relevancy of the response to the message, focus on central issues and feelings, acceptance of the speaker's

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<sup>43</sup>Richard A. Diedrich and H. Allan Dye. Group Processes: Purposes, Processes, and Outcomes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), p. 87.

<sup>44</sup>Lawrence M. Brammer. The Helping Relationship: Process and Skills (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 86.

message, involvement and relatedness to the speaker.<sup>45</sup> A brief look at these factors will prove helpful for the person who listens with the intention of understanding.

First, recognition of the speaker as a worthwhile human being encourages the speaker through warmth and acceptance. Should the listener ignore, isolate, or otherwise be indifferent to the speaker, this might prove to be a harsh form of punishment or rejection in many contexts. To avoid such a nonverbal message from being communicated to the speaker, the listener needs to acknowledge the individual with a greeting, using his/her name, showing nonverbal interest by eye contact, leaning toward the person, smiling, nodding, etc. Gestures encourage greater openness. In addition, the reduction of the amount of interruptions during the time the speaker is attempting to communicate a message will also enhance openness.

A second factor is the relevancy of response made by the listener to what has been said. When the listener misses the point of a message and picks up a minor point rather than the main thrust of the message, or changes the topic to one which might be less threatening, or tells minimally related stories, the listener discourages the speaker from continuing to share him/herself.

The opposite of these patterns of communication is em-

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<sup>45</sup>Friedman, pp. 17-20.

ploying true dialogue in which there is an exchange focusing on the central issues and feelings being expressed by the speaker. The listener promotes good communication by offering empathic responses. Empathy involves focusing attention on the speaker's, rather than the listener's, needs and intentions, making a serious effort to take his/her point of view or putting oneself in the speaker's shoes, and attempting to discern the full meaning of the message in terms of feelings which are being experienced and the reason such feelings are present. This can be done through paraphrasing, a process by which the listener puts into his/her own words what has just been heard.<sup>46</sup>

A third factor is the acceptance of the speaker's message, rather than reinterpreting or criticizing it, which can inhibit the exchange by trying to manipulate the speaker's feelings.<sup>47</sup> Frequently this is done in such ways as: ordering, directing ("You have to..."); warning, threatening ("You'd better not..."); preaching, moralizing ("You ought to..."); advising, giving solutions ("Why don't you..."); lecturing, informing ("Here are the facts..."); evaluating, blaming ("You're wrong..."); praising, agreeing ("You're right..."); name-calling, shaming ("You're foolish..."); interpreting,

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<sup>46</sup>Stanley E. Lindquist. Action Helping Skills (Fresno: Link-Care Foundation Press, 1976), p. 53.

<sup>47</sup>Diedrich and Dye, p. 84.

analyzing ("What you need..."); sympathizing, supporting ("You'll be okay..."); questioning, probing ("Why did you..."); withdrawing, avoiding ("Let's forget it..."). These processes, says Friedman, tend to impose the listener's views upon the speaker and arouse guilt or anger in the speaker about feeling as he/she does.<sup>48</sup>

An acceptable response does not impose judgment upon the speaker. Acceptable responses are descriptive of what has been shared, not critical. The intent of acceptable responses is comprehending or understanding what has been heard by the listener. Such responses are problem-oriented rather than control-oriented, with an emphasis upon a desire to collaborate in defining a mutual concern as well as seeking a solution, rather than attempting to get the other person to see something the same way as the listener views a particular situation or issue. Acceptable responses seek additional information and clarification of the situation from the speaker's viewpoint, thus becoming a demonstration of receptivity.

A fourth factor which leads to understanding through the listening process is an indication of involvement or relatedness with the speaker. This is the opposite of a cold, distant, aloof style of listening. The listener who controls the situation at all times, employs impersonal language, and gives few clues as to his/her own affective experiences, does

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<sup>48</sup>Friedman, p. 20.

not communicate involvement. A caring, involved listener is perceived as being a genuine, open, responsible person who responds on both an emotional as well as an intellectual level.

When speakers hesitate to share their real feelings in open, identifiable ways, the listener needs to be alert to indicators of feelings which are given off rather than being stated explicitly.

### The Listening Process

Broadly speaking listening involves receiving stimuli and is thus distinguished from hearing as a physiological process.<sup>49</sup> The word "receiving" implies that stimuli are taken in by the organism, subsequently processed or used. While listening involves the reception of aural stimuli (i.e., sound waves received by the ear), it is not limited to verbal signals but encompasses all signals sent by means of fluctuations in the air, noises as well as words.

Listening, a very alive, active process, is a skill of crucial importance in interpersonal communication.<sup>50</sup> Listening requires more than simply remaining quiet while the other person speaks. Listening involves participation in and entering thoroughly into the train of the other person's thoughts, exploring them along with the speaker, suggesting possible further development of thoughts, and making intelligent,

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<sup>49</sup> DeVito, p. 145.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



involved responses.<sup>51</sup> Most important, listening depends upon taking seriously what is being said. A good listener goes one step further by helping the speaker say far more and better what might otherwise be possible.<sup>52</sup>

Attentiveness, understanding, and evaluation summarize the "how" of listening. The message itself is the "what" of listening. Most important is the "why" of listening. For what purpose does a person listen? The why of listening is similar to the intention of the speaker: a desire for others to pay attention, to understand what is being said, and a fair evaluation of the message.

The goal of this section is to identify what is known about the approach to listening: when listening works and when it does not work.

Korzybski offers this diagram to illustrate the process of listening.<sup>53</sup>

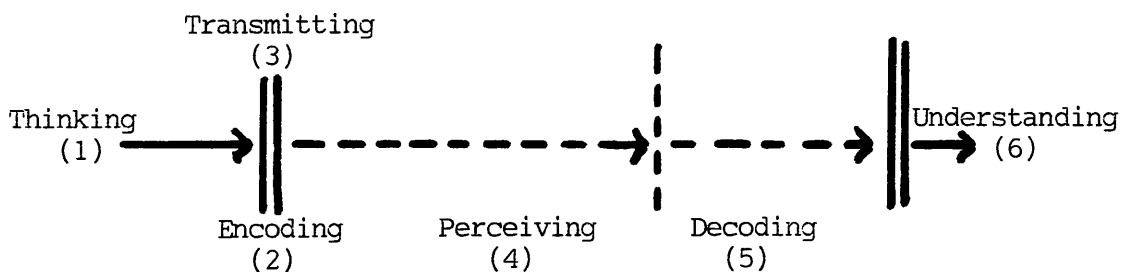


Figure 2  
General Model of Communication

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<sup>51</sup>Barbara, p. 37.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>David R. Hampton, et al. Organizational Behavior and the Practice of Management (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1973), p. 67.

This entire process begins with thinking, the genesis and framing of an idea or message in the sender's mind (1 in diagram).

The next step in the process consists of putting the thought into some form for possible communication (2 in diagram). The framing of an idea is closely related to the step of encoding. While some matters are thought in terms of language, there are occasions when feelings may be encoded through facial expressions, body movements, as well as words. Communication can take place in three different ways: (a) by an actual physical touch (a tap on the shoulder, a pat on the back, a slap on the cheek, or perhaps a handshake); (b) by more obvious visible movements (pointing a finger, a wink, nod of the head, a smile, grimace or scowl, perhaps posture, the crossing of legs or the folding of arms); and (c) by symbols which stand for something being internally experienced (crying, speaking, writing).

David K. Berlo describes four conditions which can affect the encoded message: skill, attitudes, knowledge, and the social-cultural system.<sup>54</sup>

There is little doubt that attitudes greatly influence behavior. People hold predisposed ideas on many topics. These attitudes affect communication. Further, restriction in

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<sup>54</sup>David K. Berlo. The Process of Communication (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960), pp. 30-32.

communications may result due to the extent of knowledge the individual possesses on a particular topic.<sup>55</sup> It is impossible to communicate what is not known. At the same time, should knowledge be too extensive, it is quite possible that the receiver will not understand the message. The amount of knowledge the speaker holds about a given subject will affect the message to be transferred. Finally, just as attitudes can and do affect behavior, so can one's position in the social-cultural system. Beliefs, values, all part of the culture, act to influence the communication process.<sup>56</sup>

The message can suffer from distortion regardless of the supporting apparatus used to convey it. The group of symbols chosen to transfer meaning from one person to another, the content of the message itself, and the decisions the source makes in both the selection and arrangement of the message, can have considerable affect upon the message.

The next step necessary in communication is the transmission (3 in diagram) of the actual message via some medium.

The channel or medium through which the message is communicated can bridge the gap between the source and the receiver. Channels or mediums of communication can be classified as either formal or informal. Formal channels are

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<sup>55</sup> Stephen P. Robbins. Managing Organizational Conflict (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), p. 33.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

established by an organization.<sup>57</sup> The concern of this discussion lies more with the informal means of communication, as the focus is upon the affects of active listening within the life of the individual.

Perceiving (4 in diagram) means the listener must see, hear, or feel the incoming communication with one or more of the senses. In many instances this can be the critical point within communication as perception often affects the next step.

After perceiving what the sender is attempting to communicate, the listener must then decode (5 in diagram) the message. This process suggests the receiver put the incoming message into some form that will make it understandable.

The receiver is the person to whom the message is directed. Before the receiver can understand the message, it is necessary to translate the symbols in the channel into some form which can be understood. Just as the encoder (sender) is limited by skills, attitudes, knowledge, and social-cultural systems, so is the receiver equally restricted.

The final step Korzybski suggests through his diagram hopefully will result in understanding (6 in diagram).

DuBrin however suggests that communication is a more complicated process. He offers this simplified model as an elementary model of the interpersonal communication process.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

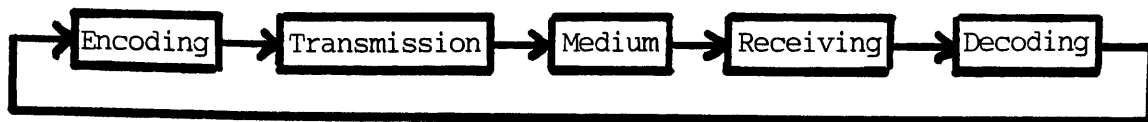


Figure 3

DuBrin's Model of  
Interpersonal Communication<sup>58</sup>

DuBrin's model is similar to that of Korzybski's. Both Korzybski and DuBrin suggest that communication between two people can be conceptualized as a process which involves the following sequence of events: encoding, transmitting, receiving, and decoding. The author believes the process is cyclical. Upon decoding the message, the receiver in turn sends a message back to the original sender to complete the communication process which is a two-way process.

Lyman Steil has constructed a model under the rubric SIER - sensing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding.<sup>59</sup>

Building upon the assertion no human being can learn to speak unless at a very early age he/she can hear others, Steil says individuals are born with the capacity to learn through the process of listening. The model which he has constructed describes the four main aspects of listening: the ability to sense (in this case, to hear, or to get a reading through some nonverbal form), to interpret (understand what is being communicated), to evaluate (decide the relevance and validity of the message), and to respond (give appropriate indication

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<sup>58</sup>Andrew J. DuBrin. Fundamentals of Organizational Behavior: An Applied Perspective (Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press, Inc., 1974), p. 274.

<sup>59</sup>Steil, p. 10.

of what has been sensed from the message).<sup>60</sup>

Steil discusses each of these components in greater detail. Hearing, the sensing component of listening, is the physical auditory response to what is being said.<sup>61</sup> Much present-day listening has become highly selective, due to the noise of the modern-day environment. It would be impossible to survive all the input of human communication without being selective.<sup>62</sup> Living in a result-oriented society, the desire may be to skip the first three levels of listening. The desire to jump from sensing, interpreting, and evaluating, and proceed directly to responding could cause the death of the communication process. By skipping any one of the intermediate levels, a response at best would be irrelevant or inappropriate; at worst, it might be disastrous.

The second component is that of interpreting. Interpreting, often the most difficult of all the listening faculties, is the ability to interpret what lies buried in the brain and yet develops inextricably with the human ability to speak.<sup>63</sup> In any language, the ability to interpret becomes highly selective. While it is possible to understand language, it is not always possible to understand one another. This second component, Steil suggests, may be the cause of more

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 11, 12.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

trouble in life than any other cause.<sup>64</sup>

Semanticists and social scientists have pointed out that each individual lives to some degree in a world of his/her own and that few events or objects mean exactly the same thing to all.<sup>65</sup> When making any interpretation, the listener must take into account the other person's background, prejudices, and viewpoints, as well as his/her own. It is critical to understand the differences between a fact, an inference, an assumption, and an opinion. Effort must be made to weigh the emotions and value judgments that society imposes upon people.<sup>66</sup> Failure at this level of listening can often result from a tendency to misinterpret what someone is saying simply because the listener does not look at the situation through the eyes of the other person.

The third component, based on Steil's SIER model, is evaluation (the act of appraising what has been heard and understood). In all the content of thinking, evaluation plays a major role in the manner of listening and what is heard and what is chosen to be heard. It is possible to make unconscious assumptions at this level of listening. The desire to listen to another person may be absent because of looks, dress, or some other matter trivial to the listening process.

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

On the other hand, there may be a willingness to listen carefully to someone else who talks nonsense simply because someone has said that he/she is brilliant. There may also be a tendency not to listen to things that do not agree with one's beliefs and values. The evaluation of another determines how well one is able to listen.<sup>67</sup>

The fourth component, responding, is often overlooked both in its implication and its nature. Being an action-oriented society, there is a tendency to respond largely by action. However, response as a component may not always lead to action. Yet a nonresponse approach can destroy the relationship between the speaker and the listener, a relationship which is necessary to communication and can destroy communication itself. Caution must be exercised not to assume that response means agreement or action. It does imply, however, the warmth and receptivity that makes the speaker feel that he/she has been given a full hearing, that he/she is understood and respected regardless of the listener's evaluation. A good response which is nonjudgmental provides the speaker with a sense of having been heard.

#### Summary

Probably the most important single function performed by an individual is that of listening to another person. Active listening requires full attention on the part of the listener.

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 24.



Since listening does not come natural, skills for effective listening can be learned. The fact that people spend the larger percentage of each waking day listening to others demonstrates the need to be equipped for this important activity. The goal of active listening is greater understanding of the message so change results for both the listener and speaker.

Active listening requires certain attitudes on the part of the listener. He/She must want to understand the speaker. He/She must have an earnest intent to be with the speaker, with respect to thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. The listener not only listens with the intent of understanding the speaker but also with the thought that his/her own views are changing and that he/she may learn something new from the speaker.

The importance of listening to other people cannot be overemphasized. Listening serves to make the person being listened to feel worthwhile and important. Listening is the best way for the listener to obtain valuable information.

Nature has given us two ears but one tongue which is a gentle hint that we should listen more than we talk.

## Chapter 3

### COMMON BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE, ACTIVE LISTENING

The average individual spends nearly 70 percent of his/her waking time communicating through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.<sup>1</sup> In order for communication (i.e., the dynamic transmission of meaning from one person to another) to be successful, the information must not only be sent, but also understood. Only when one is understood does real communication take place.

Jesse S. Nirenberg distinguishes three levels of listening.<sup>2</sup> First, there is the level of nonhearing (the individual does not listen at all). Second, there is the level of hearing (when a person hears what is said and remembers it but does not allow any of the ideas to penetrate beyond the level of memory). Third, there is the level of thinking (the listener not only hears what the speaker said but also thinks about it). On the third level of listening, the listener evaluates and analyzes what is being said. The third level (the level of listening, thinking) is defined as active, effective listening.

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen R. Robbins, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup>Jesse S. Nirenberg. Getting Through to People (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

Drakeford indicates an effective listener must give the speaker his/her undivided attention.<sup>3</sup> It is the speaker's moment, and every aspect of the listener's demeanor must suggest: "Come on. Let's have it. You are the center of the stage of my thinking."<sup>4</sup>

Good listening skills are crucial to effective listening. Listening is an active process by which the listener shows respect for the speaker and demonstrates interest in the information being presented. Active listening encourages the speaker to relax and communicate more information. In brief, good listening builds the foundation of an effective helping relationship.

Borck and Fawcett indicate that listening involves three components: doing, saying, and observing.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, they recommend four nonverbal activities associated with active listening. (1) The listener must assume an active listening posture. By assuming an active listening posture (facing the speaker; holding head up straight; arms resting on arm rest of the chair, desk top, or lap; feet resting on the floor), the listener demonstrates an interest in what the speaker is saying. (2) A good listener maintains eye contact. By looking directly into the speaker's eyes, the listener shows a

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<sup>3</sup>John Drakeford, p. 176.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Leslie E. Borck and Stephen B. Fawcett. Learning Counseling and Problem-Solving Skills (New York: The Haworth Press, 1982), p. 17.

continued interest in the speaker. (3) An active listener should use natural facial expressions when paying attention. Facial expressions help the speaker know the listener is following what is being said and is taking the message seriously. (4) A fourth nonverbal activity consists of nonverbal encouragements. Nonverbal encouragements acknowledge an on-going interest in the speaker's message and encourages the speaker to continue talking.

Listening is at best a difficult matter. Yet it may be made easier, more pleasant, and more efficient if some of the obstacles are eliminated.

#### Barriers to Effective Listening

King Solomon, hailed as one of the wisest of all men, wrote in the Book of Ecclesiastes (3:7) that every activity of mankind has a season. Among other things, he said there is a time to speak up and a time to be quiet. A good listener demonstrates an attitude of openness. Self-centered individuals are not good listeners. The listening process calls for the listener to enter actively into another person's thinking and try to understand just what is going on within that person. The listener actively works at discerning the message the speaker is attempting to convey.

Due to many barriers to active listening, the possibility of making contact in communication is not always easy. This section will examine nine barriers (see Figure 4) to active listening along with corrective measures which foster

growth in active listening.

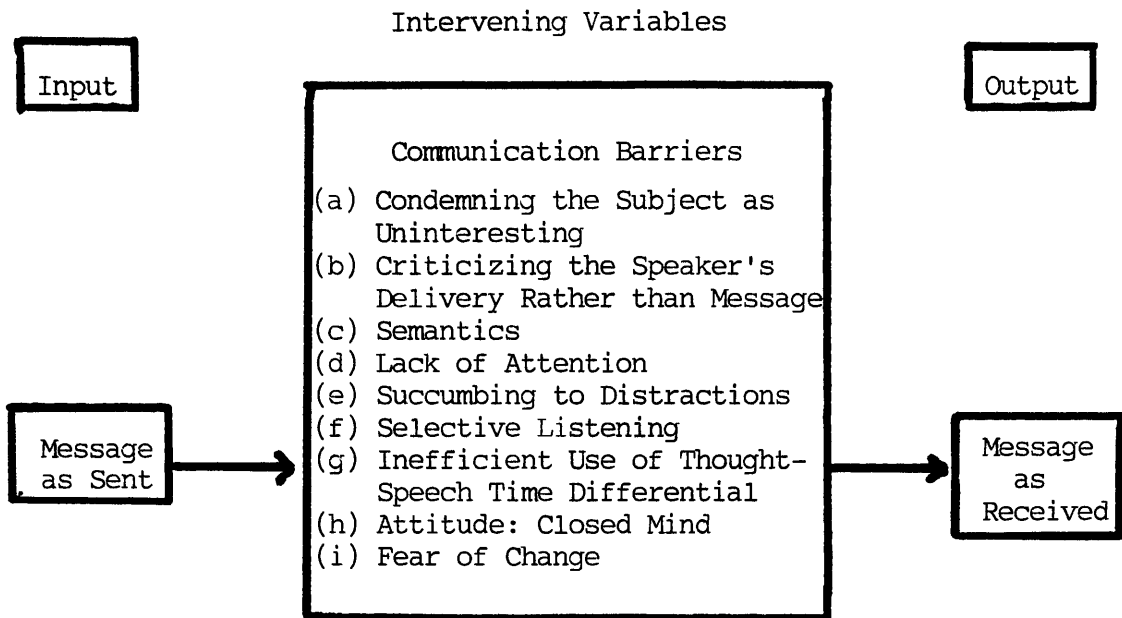


Figure 4  
Barriers to the  
Communication Process

Barrier one: Condemning the Subject as Uninteresting.

G.K. Chesterton said there is no such thing as an uninteresting subject, only uninteresting people. He was pointing out the number one block to effective listening, condemning the subject as uninteresting without a hearing.

Morris maintains that human beings have a tendency to judge before they understand.<sup>6</sup> This tendency to judge or evaluate before understanding the message can terminate the listening process. Having judged, the listener ceases to

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<sup>6</sup>Jud Morris. The Art of Listening (Boston: Industrial Education Institute, 1968), p. 38.

listen. Dr. Carl R. Rogers said about the tendency to judge or evaluate:

I would like to propose, as an hypothesis for consideration, that the major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or<sup>7</sup> disapprove, the statement of the other person.

Barker suggests with a little creative mental effort the listener can think of several applications a topic might have.<sup>8</sup> Although a subject may appear uninteresting at the outset, it is possible to glean value through active listening.

Adair avows the remedy to this barrier is the realization that condemning any subject as uninteresting represents a public acknowledgement of being an uninteresting person.<sup>9</sup> A variation of this symptom is the pre-judgment of a speaker as uninteresting for one reason or another. "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" inquired Nathanael of Philip (John 1:46). Large numbers of people are condemned to silence because those in the position of listening do not believe the speakers have any interesting contribution to make.

DeVito points out that all communications are potentially

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<sup>7</sup>Carl R. Rogers. Taken from a paper presented to The Centennial Conference on Communication, Northwestern University, October 11, 1951.

<sup>8</sup>Barker, P. 62.

<sup>9</sup>Adair, p. 189.

interesting and relevant.<sup>10</sup> To prejudge either the subject or the speaker and "tune them out", the listener will never be proven wrong. Simultaneously, the listener closes him/herself off from potentially useful information. Morris advocates the listener can learn infinitely more by the method of being an inquirer, than by contradiction or argumentation, and will make a friend each and every time he/she listens in this manner.<sup>11</sup> The impression given the speaker is to share more because the listener is open and receptive to the ideas or message being communicated.

The listener has a tendency to evaluate every incoming communication by evaluating the sender. This tendency to evaluate, to discourage negative information, and to categorize the communication and its sender prematurely becomes one of the major barriers to effective listening and attainment of understanding.

Barrier two: Criticizing the Speaker's Delivery Rather than Message. Barker and DeVito are in agreement that students of speech and communication often become sensitive to aspects of a speaker's delivery which lead to a tendency to dwell on or analyze the speaker's delivery rather than the message.<sup>12</sup> Students of communication tend to be aware of eye

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<sup>10</sup>DeVito, p. 148.

<sup>11</sup>Morris, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup>Barker, p. 63 and DeVito, p. 150.

contact, voice quality, rate of speaking, as well as volume. While eye contact, voice quality, rate of speaking, and volume are important to analyze from a communicator's point of view, speakers should be aware that these elements may have a negative or positive affect on untrained listeners. One way of expressing non-listening ability, according to Adair, is to fasten on the speaker's delivery or the quality of any audio or visual aids employed in communicating the message.<sup>13</sup>

While there may be difficulties in ignoring various gestures or particular aspect of the voice, a focus on these dimensions of communication serve to divert time and energy away from the message. The listener can fall into the trap of devoting too much attention to the way the message is packaged and not enough to the message itself. Barker emphasizes the central concern in effective listening should be to disregard negative or novel elements in the speaker's delivery or physical appearance.<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to listen when either the delivery is bad or the audio or visual aids are out of control, but such occasions do sort out the hearers from the listeners.

Barrier three: Semantics. An old adage says, "There are three races: men, women, and children, and none of them speak the same language."<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately there are many more

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<sup>13</sup>Adair, pp. 189-90.

<sup>14</sup>Barker, p. 62.

<sup>15</sup>Hampton, p. 78.



"languages" than three, perhaps as many as there are individuals in the world. Even if the sender and the receiver know the same language, erroneous decoding may occur. The problem is twofold: first, each individual's language is a reflection of his/her experience, and second, words are ambiguous.

The originator of a message can encode only within the framework of his/her own experience and knowledge. Similarly, the receiver can decode only within his/her own experience (see Figure 5). Without common experiences or empathic psychological sets communication is impossible. In addition to the problem of experience gaps, words are troublesome. Words themselves, Hampton asserts, do not have meanings. Only people have meanings which they attach to words.<sup>16</sup>

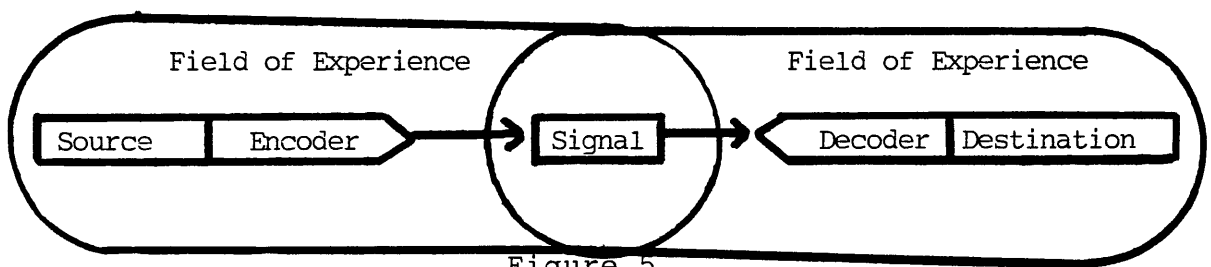


Figure 5

Commonness of Experience  
Necessary for Communication<sup>17</sup>

Semantics, the meaning of language symbols (as opposed to phonetics, the meaning of language sounds) poses a serious

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>G.T. Vardaman and C.C. Halterman. Managerial Control Through Communication (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968).

barrier to communication. The same words or groups of words may convey entirely different meanings to different people.

Owens has outlined three specific barriers in communication related to semantics.<sup>18</sup> (1) By-passing. By-passing is a misunderstanding in which the meaning of a word (or other symbol) used by the sender is different from the meaning attached to that word or symbol by the receiver. The basis for the prevalence of by-passing can be illustrated by the fact that the Oxford Dictionary shows 14,070 different meanings for the 500 basic words which people use. This is a ratio of 28:1. In other words, on the average, any one of these 500 words can have one of 28 different meanings, suggests Owens.<sup>19</sup>

(2) Stereotyping. Stereotyping is the use of a term which is general, as if both the listener and the sender use the word to mean the same thing. The basis underlying stereotyping is the finiteness of words used to represent the infinity of things, which causes the mind to arrange things into groups with common characteristics. Attitudes, either favoring or rejecting certain groups of words, are a determining factor in the formation of and use of stereotypes.

(3) Polarization. Polarization (often referred to as "black" and "white" thinking) is the tendency to reduce everything to

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<sup>18</sup>James Owens. Program Outlines for Management Training 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Management Education Ltd., 1974).

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

one of two opposite classes. The tendency to force things into one or the other of a pair of contraries will distort the reality and create a verbal impression that does not fit the reality.

The semantic barrier is minimized when the listener is alert to it, and on guard against it. The best "cure" for the semantic barrier is simply to be ready for it, acknowledge its presence and effect, and compensate for it by considering all possible meanings and selecting the appropriate one. When in doubt, inquire.

Barrier four: Lack of Attention. Barbara says psychological studies indicate the individual's attention span, while listening, exceeds no more than two or three seconds. It is easy to be distracted by outside noise, odor, light, mannerism, voice changes, or moving objects.<sup>20</sup> By the time the listener resumes listening to the speaker, part or all of what is being said might be missed. Day-dreaming, daily conflicts, doodling, or even dozing can lead to further distractions and the important loss of words, ideas, or directions. Lack of attention, according to Morris, has the effect of cancelling out listening.<sup>21</sup>

Closely related to the lack of attention is faking atten-

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<sup>20</sup>Barbara, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup>Morris, p. 100.

tion. There are times during which certain thoughts race through the mind of the listener, thoughts which may be interesting or even important, that it becomes difficult to force oneself to listen to the speaker. Due to either a fear of punishment in some situations or that of avoiding embarrassment, the listener pretends to be listening by means of facial expressions, eye contact, and perhaps an occasional nodding of the head. The problem when such faked attention becomes a habit, listening suffers. The ability to recall what the speaker said can serve as a check here. The listener must try as hard as possible to understand the speaker and exert a real effort to keep his/her mind on what the speaker is saying, in order to listen actively and effectively.

Barrier five: Succumbing to Distractions. Barker and Adair state that soft music being played in the background, noise, uncomfortable chairs, heat or cold, movement in the background, sunlight or gloom are distractions with which the listener must often deal in order to focus complete attention upon the speaker.<sup>22</sup> The failure to adjust to, or compensate for, distractions is a common listening problem. The good listener will try to deal with the distraction in some helpful way. The poor listener allows the distraction to dominate his/her mind and thus rob him/her of giving complete attention to the speaker. If the listener cannot modify the

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<sup>22</sup>Barker, pp. 64-5 and Adair, p. 191.

external environmental conditions, then he/she must modify his/her own internal listening behavior in order to assimilate fully the message the speaker transmits. The higher the quality of listening the less power externals have over the relationship of the listener and the speaker. Listening affirms or builds the relationship in the midst of forces which may be at work to disintegrate it.

Barrier six: Selective Listening. According to DuBrin the concept of selective perception helps explain why an individual responds to some messages and not to others.<sup>23</sup> Adair refines this concept by implying the listener may listen to portions of a message but not to other portions of the same message.<sup>24</sup> Adair says selective listening means an individual is programmed to turn a deaf ear to certain topics or themes. The danger centers on selective listening becoming habitual and unconscious. DuBrin supports this notion by indicating people tend to receive those messages which are nonthreatening and not receive threatening messages.<sup>25</sup> The difficulty with selective listening is passing up an opportunity for growth which is one of the goals of effective communication and listening.

Barrier seven: Inefficient Use of Thought-Speech Time

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<sup>23</sup>DuBrin, p. 295.

<sup>24</sup>Adair, p. 190.

<sup>25</sup>DuBrin, p. 295.

Differential. The individual can think more quickly than a speaker can speak. Morris states the average American speaks at a rate of approximately 125 words a minute, while the same person thinks at a rate of two or three times that fast.<sup>26</sup> This thought-speed-speech-speed differential must be taken into consideration. Otherwise, as Barker points out, the listener's mind may run ahead of the speaker.<sup>27</sup> Barbara indicates that mental digression affects the listener's power of concentration and can leave the listener confused, losing part or all of the message.<sup>28</sup> Any listening habits that distract the listener allow him/her to become mentally removed from what the speaker is saying.

Constructive or destructive use of the time-rate differential often makes the difference between good and bad listeners. DeVito suggests the best use of this time could be for understanding and learning the message.<sup>29</sup> With this extra time, the listener might review concepts already made by the speaker, search for additional meanings, attempt to predict what the speaker will say next. The important point is the listener stay on the topic with the speaker and not allow his/her thoughts to wander. Morris says the real secret to

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<sup>26</sup>Morris, p. 95.

<sup>27</sup>Barker, p. 64.

<sup>28</sup>Barbara, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup>DeVito, pp. 149-50.

the success of listening is not to conclude that one understands the speaker until the speaker has finished speaking.<sup>30</sup> The goal of active listening is an attempt to understand the speaker, with the possibility of growth resulting for both the listener and the speaker.

Barrier eight: Attitude: The Closed Mind. One of the common and most serious blocks to listening on the understanding level is attitude, i.e., the closed mind. A listener with a closed mind maintains the posture that he/she knows the answer and is happy in the security of his/her current beliefs. A listener with a closed mind will not listen to anything contrary to those beliefs and as a result the speaker fails to make an impact upon the listener. Nothing has such an immediate and deadly effect on one's listening ability as a closed mind.

Morris contends that a listener with an open mind, on the other hand, will learn.<sup>31</sup> The open mind serves as a magnet which attracts new knowledge to the listener. Everybody, no matter how exalted, can learn from everybody else, no matter how humble. To possess a truly open mind, the listener will learn from everyone who interacts through the communication process. The reverse is also true: if the mind is closed, the listener will learn nothing. A closed mind chokes off communication. An unwillingness to listen demonstrates immaturity,

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<sup>30</sup>Morris, p. 103.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

dogmatism, and intellectual tyranny, says Morris.<sup>32</sup> Voltaire, the great French statesman, said, "I disagree with what he says but I will defend to the death his right to say it."<sup>33</sup> It is the privilege and obligation of the listener to understand the person who is attempting to communicate a message.

Barrier nine: Fear of Change. Diedrich and Dye believe one of the barriers to creative participation in the communication process is the fear of being changed.<sup>34</sup> People are not as free to give themselves and express their uniqueness in an atmosphere that is threatening, judgmental, evaluative, critical, or moralizing. An important aid to communication, contend Diedrich and Dye, is creating a nonthreatening, non-evaluative, and nonrejecting atmosphere.<sup>35</sup>

Morris maintains the risk of being changed by the other person is a very real subconscious fear.<sup>36</sup> The fear of change prevents the possibilities of listening with understanding as it threatens the listener's security. Dr. Carl Rogers concurs:

If you really understand another person in this way, if you are willing to enter his private world

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Diedrich and Dye, p. 83.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Morris, p. 183.



and see the way life appears to him, without any attempt to make evaluative judgments, you run the risk of being changed. You might see it in his way, you might find yourself influenced in your attitudes or your personality. This risk of being changed is one of the <sup>37</sup>most frightening prospects most of us can face.

This major block to listening stems from the natural tendency to cling to the familiar. Fear of being changed becomes an insidious block to effective listening because it is subconscious in nature and the listener does not want to admit its existence. The only way to correct this habit is to recognize its existence, acknowledge its personal nature and exert a sincere effort to correct it. Adair believes what is at stake is not merely the ability of the speaker to communicate his/her thoughts or concerns, but also the skill of the listener to allow the transference of such thoughts and ideas.<sup>38</sup> The stout-hearted listener will follow this difficult path. The lazy listener will give up upon encountering the first obstacle. A closed mind does not permit growth, a major goal of active listening for both the speaker and the listener.

#### Useful Guides to Listening

According to Ralph G. Nichols several themes should guide

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<sup>37</sup>Carl R. Rogers, On Becoming a Person (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1961).

<sup>38</sup>Adair, p. 191.

the listening process.<sup>39</sup> (1) Judge the content, not the delivery. While many listeners attempt to excuse themselves from listening on the basis of the speaker's character, or sound of his/her voice, the good listener goes beyond the personality of the speaker or the delivery of the message, believing the speaker may know something of value which will benefit the listener. (2) Resist distractions. A good listener actively fights distractions. Sometimes the battle over distractions can be easily won (e.g., closing a door, shutting off a radio, moving closer to the speaker). At other times when distractions cannot be dealt with easily it becomes a matter of intense concentration on the part of the listener. (3) Work at listening. Good listening takes energy. Attention is a form of directed energy. By establishing eye contact and maintaining it, or by using posture and facial expressions that suggest to the speaker his/her efforts are a matter of real concern to the listener, the listener is able to help the speaker express him/herself with greater clarity. The listener also profits by better understanding the improved communication which he/she helps the speaker achieve. (4) Find area of interest. It is a rare subject which does not have any possible interest or use for the listener. Adair contends the listener naturally screens what is being said for its interest or value.<sup>40</sup> (5) Capitalize on thought-speed.

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<sup>39</sup>Nichols and Stevens, loc. cit.

<sup>40</sup>Adair, p. 196.

The good listener uses thought-speed to advantage. The spare time between the rate of speech and the rate of listening can best be used by thinking of what is being said. To develop such a pattern, Adair believes the listener should: (a) try to anticipate what the speaker is going to say, (b) mentally summarize what the speaker has been saying (i.e., what point has been made already), (c) weigh the speaker's evidence by mentally questioning it, and (d) listen between the lines as the speaker does not always put everything important into words (e.g., changing tones, changing volume of voice, facial expressions, gestures with hands, as well as movement of body may have important meaning).<sup>41</sup> (6) Keep an open mind. Effective listeners try to identify their own prejudices, blind spots, and semiconscious assumptions. Instead of turning a deaf ear, the active, effective listener seeks to improve upon perception and understanding in those areas.

#### Summary

The listening process is complex but vital to effective, meaningful relationships. This process is never really mastered. One can continually improve on it. Active listening requires certain attitudes, knowledge, techniques, common sense, and a willingness to try.

Adair refers to Robert T. Oliver, who wrote:

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

For the real master of communication...listening and talking are interwoven...When he is listening, he is standing at the threshold of his companion's mind; and when he is talking, he invites his auditor to stand at the doorway of his own thought.<sup>42</sup>

Adair believes the ability to move easily and flexibly from one position to the other in pursuit of a common subject or theme constitutes good communication.<sup>43</sup>

Above all else, listening should be a positive influence which enables or supports the speaker in the difficult business of transferring thought, with all its shades of meaning, into sentences and words. Listening is valuable because it creates the necessary conditions in which the mind can get to work to sort out, restructure, and digest what is being said. By overcoming the barriers to listening, the process of listening will allow growth and understanding on the part of both the listener and the speaker.

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

## Chapter 4

### PERCEPTION FORMATION AND FACTORS FIGURING INTO PERCEPTION FORMATION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

An effort has been made (in Chapters 2 and 3) to deal with the listening process and barriers which can negatively affect communication. We found (1) a distortion of the message or (2) a misunderstanding within the communication process may leave the listener and speaker at the same level of understanding, as prior to communication. A distorted message can have an adverse affect upon the communication process by creating negative change, defeating the purpose of communication. When negative change results, the involvement of one individual with another individual or group of persons becomes severely limited. The result may be the creation of wrong perceptions.

The church member needs to understand the effects of perceptions and the meaning of membership within The United Methodist Church, to be faithful to his/her membership vows.

Before examining the relationship of active listening and perceptions of the local church (Chapter 5), let us address (1) perception formation and the effects of perceptions upon the church member, and (2) factors which figure into the formation of perceptions of the local church.

#### Perception Formation

Perception (defined in Chapter 1) is the view one individual holds of self, another person, or group of people

based on observations, knowledge, feelings, and impressions. In light of this definition, perceptions are the result of the individual's (1) encounters with others, (2) interpretations arising from these encounters, and (3) feelings which such encounters evoke. A brief discussion of these stages, resulting in perception formation, follows.

The Role of Encounters in Perception Formation. Perceptions are initiated by the encounter of one individual with another individual or group. To understand life, the individual needs to focus upon relationships. To whom is the individual related and for what purposes? How will the individual relate human needs to divine resources? By what means of grace can the individual relate to others? In order to bring people together within the fellowship of the church, the church should provide for the individual a sense of belonging. The question is how we approach one another, and with what kind of intentions and expectations of genuine responsiveness. What interests do we have to share? What attitudes of mutual concern do we actually show to one another? How do we honestly feel toward one another? How do we belong to one another in warm affection and active responsibility? These are all questions which must be answered in order to determine the quality of relationships between people.

Relationship is the key to these questions. To enter into relationships of mutual appreciation is a function of

perception.<sup>1</sup> Our initial concern is: How do we perceive others? and How do we perceive ourselves? Not until we perceive other persons as persons we can trust enough to accept openly, do we drop our defenses and become free to grow in mutual appreciation and security.

Through these self-other perceptions we discover our relationships. Before we discover each other, however, we are already related in time-space and physical energies which hold us together in a system of dynamic interrelations. This interrelatedness with one another makes communication possible.

#### The Role of Interpretations in Perception Formation

The interaction evoked by the encounters between individuals leads to interpretations given an individual or group. To improve our communications with other people, we need to: (1) learn the truth about them, and (2) discover better ways of communicating mutual appreciation of our best human traits. If differences separate us, our first effort may be one of trying to make them more like us. We may naively assume our ways as superior. However, others may not want to be like us. Their ways seem better to them. Thus, a more sound approach, to those who differ from us, is to: (1) honor their right to be different, and (2) seek to appreciate why they enjoy and

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<sup>1</sup>Robert R. Blake and Glenn V. Ramsey. Perception: An Approach to Personality (New York: Ronald Press, 1951).

approve their way as serenely as we do our own. By learning to appreciate our differences, we come to understand one another for the first time. As understanding is more successfully communicated, we realize there is good in their way as well as in ours. Differences between individuals may potentially enrich relationships.

A deeper appreciation of one another is possible with the presence of trust. Through communication, one comes to perceive the other as a friend to trust and empathize with him/her by emotional identification. Perceptions and feelings of relatedness may be communicated in words as opportunities arise, for the purpose of exploring the meaning involved. One should not conclude that verbalization is the only channel of communication. As discussed in Chapter 2, active listening involves both verbal and nonverbal activities. Persons give signals to each other by gestures, facial expressions, postural attitudes, and tone of voice. Other cues sensed by the alert observer can vastly increase the range of interpersonal communication. Crucial for good communication is trust.

The perception of a person as trustworthy opens the way for empathy. Empathy is critical as one of the basic concepts of active listening. Until one feels what the other feels, the change of distorted or negative perceptions will hardly be effected.



To be specific, we can say that as we perceive, so we act. In other words, perceptions regulate our behavior. We approach others based on (1) our perceptions of them, (2) what they seem to expect of us, and (3) how we are supposed to act in reference to them. By our perceptions of what others expect of us, we form self-perceptions.

Self-perceptions cause us to take certain roles in the social scene. Self-perceptions represent our understanding of who we are and our responsibility in relation to other persons. Each of us assumes many roles in our social relations. These roles will be determined by our interpretation of the appropriate role or behavior for each occasion. Until we perceive a person to be responsive, we hesitate to communicate our self with him/her.

Thus, perception is the first condition of understanding. Perception regulates our attitudes and guides our efforts to communicate. When perceiving another to be a person with whom we can share common experiences and explore mutual interests, we come to enlarge the area of our understandings, as we affirm and share values of deepening significance.

The Role of Feelings in Perception Formation. Another impact perception has upon the individual is the generating of feelings. Viktor Frankl observed in a concentration camp that when a person loses touch with how he/she actually feels about events and substitutes what other people tell him/her

to feel, when his/her capacity to feel is eroded, when he/she loses his/her sense of being needed by some one, he/she quickly dies, for he/she has disintegrated as a person.<sup>2</sup>

Feeling, based on observations, knowledge from past experiences, and perceptions, is a report of self-in-the-world. Feeling's organizer is the encounter, the engagement of the individual within the world. The reality of the world, received and evaluated, leads to the perceptions an individual has of him/herself, another, or the church.

Through feelings, the individual's self-concept or identity is stirred up.<sup>3</sup> Without feeling there would be no meaning. Feeling connects the individual with different experiences forming a story of one's life which is meaningful to the individual. The individual brings memories of past experiences to present relationships, stirring one's imagination toward the future. Feelings also afford an image of people with whom the individual interacts, as well as ideas about the world and how the world functions. Thus, feelings mobilize the perception process.

The Importance of Perceptions. While feelings can distort communication, perceptions of others also can potentially distort communication.<sup>4</sup> Not knowing what you are thinking

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<sup>2</sup>Ross Snyder. On Becoming Human (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>4</sup>Paul E. Johnson. Psychology of Pastoral Care (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 313.

and feeling toward me, may result in a different interpretation of you. Not knowing what the other person is thinking or wanting may result in our minds not meeting at all. I may be speaking to the person I imagine you to be, while you may (or may not) be listening to the person you infer I am. Perceiving, therefore, is the threshold of all experience.<sup>5</sup>

Perceptions are important as ways of interpreting our impressions of others or objects, as well as self. There can be no direct knowledge of an object or person apart from the act of observing. We infer the nature of things and persons from the appearances they present to us. We are not passive receivers, but serve as active tuning and focusing agents. We select and organize the order of experience according to the interests and relationships we choose to perceive. In these ways, we construct our perceptions and create the images and patterns of our knowledge.

A further important function of perceptions is that perceptions give birth to our motives. What we perceive as desirable moves us to go in search for it. Life is continuously oriented to goals, drawing us in the direction of anticipated values which can satisfy our needs. Persons are seekers of values, not as a lonely adventurer, but in conjunction with other persons who also seek values.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

Every person will be shaped by his/her perceptions of the goals sought and religious values assimilated. Among our basic motivations is the need to relate and be related to other persons. Relationships are essential to life itself, as well as to a widening range of values. This need for human relationship involves the hunger for interpersonal response, to recognize and be recognized, to express ideas and share feelings, to offer values and be accepted as valuable, to question and seek approval, to understand and be understood. Through the Body of Christ one hopes to find relationships and values which can satisfy these driving needs.

We now turn our attention to some of the factors emphasized by The United Methodist Church, which figure into the formation of perceptions of the local church by its members.

#### Factors Figuring Into Perception Formation of The Local Church

Before addressing the relationship of perceptions and listening skills of members at Trinity United Methodist Church (see Chapter 5), some factors which figure into the members' perceptions of the local church need consideration.

Therefore, the emphases being considered in the remainder of this chapter are (1) faithful participation by members in the local church; (2) possibilities for change through active participation; (3) nurturing of members by the local church; and (4) Christian action as a means of empathy with others.

Factor One: Faithful Participation. The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, in speaking of church membership, states:

Faithful participation in the local church is essential for personal growth and for developing an increasing sensitivity to the will and grace of God. As members involve themselves in private and public prayer, worship, the Sacraments, study, Christian action, systematic giving, and holy discipline, they grow in their appreciation of Christ, understanding of God at work in history and the natural order, and an understanding of themselves. (§212)<sup>6</sup>

To further stress the possibilities for change and growth of the member, The Discipline (§213) further admonishes that

...faithful participation in the corporate life of the congregation is an obligation of the Christian to his fellow members of the Body of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

For the first and second century Christian such an admonition would have been unnecessary. It was simply taken for granted that when one becomes a Christian he/she also decided to participate fully in the corporate life of the church. Following Christ and being a part of "the Body of Christ" were one and the same thing.

This concept is brought to the attention of each person uniting with The United Methodist Church. Such a concept was unquestioned by the early Christian church. This concept actually began with Jesus' example. Luke tells us that it

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<sup>6</sup>The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 1984 (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1984), p. 114.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

was Jesus' custom to go to the synagogue service on the sabbath (Luke 4:16). Christ thought of himself as a part of the corporate body who worshipped together each week.

In accepting as His own the message of the great prophets and leaders, Christ said that He did not come to destroy the laws but to fulfill them, to join with others in making them what they were meant to be (Matthew 5:17). Like every good Jew, Christ thought of Himself as part of a group of people who had a special covenant with God. They were called, not as individuals, but as a total people to serve God and their neighbors in such a way that "his kingdom would come and his will be done on earth as in heaven" (Luke 11:2).

Later, when the followers of Jesus were forced out of the Jewish church, they continued to think of themselves as part of the corporate body, not as individual disciples. They spoke of themselves as "the people of God" (see Romans 9:25-26; II Corinthians 6:14ff; Titus 2:14; Acts 15:14; Romans 6:16; Hebrews 8:10; I Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 21:3); "the people of the covenant" (see Romans 9:7-8; Galatians 3:29); and "the new Israel" (see Romans 9:6; I Corinthians 10:18; Galatians 6:16). Paul later became their spokesman when he pictured the church as the "body of Christ" (see Romans 12:4; I Corinthians 10:17; 12:12; Ephesians 1:22; 4:12; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:19; 3:15). Paul further wrote:

Just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. If the foot should say, "Because

I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body", that would not make it any less a part of the body (I Corinthians 12:12-15).

Paul assumes the individual Christian is obligated to participate in the corporate life of the congregation.

The Book of Acts reflects much the same spirit in the church at Jerusalem. Acts tells how each Christian was expected to (1) share with other members of the church (Acts 1), (2) meet together regularly for prayer (Acts 1), (3) organize themselves and elect deacons to help care for widows and orphans (Acts 6). The early Christian believed Christ expected them to participate in the corporate life of the congregation. In addition, they viewed this as the best way to carry on His mission.

Many people today assume a different attitude toward participation in the church. The stand some take says, "I believe in Jesus Christ. I try to live a Christian life; but don't ask me to be a part of the church." For such people, discipleship is altogether an individual matter. Instead of asking, "What can I do for God's church?" they ask, "What can the church do for me?"

An illustration might be helpful. During the Twentieth Century, we have learned the only way possible to put a man on the moon was through the individual's participation in a larger organization. There are many who say, "As an individual Christian, I have no need to be a part of the Christian organization." What might have happened had an astronaut said, "As an individual astronaut, I have no need

to be a part of the NASA organization?" Rather, he/she thinks of him/herself as a part of a great network of people, past and present, working together, supplementing, sharing, checking, correcting, and strengthening one another. Imagine what might happen if individual Christians had anywhere the desire to participate in the church and its mission in the world that scientists, government, and business have had to the organization that put men on the moon. As Christians, we are called to remember that the best and most creative service becomes possible only when we pool our resources and organize our efforts, through faithful participation in the church.

Dr. John Baillie, commenting on Cyprian's statement that outside the church there is no salvation, says this simply means "the man who keeps to himself cannot be made whole."<sup>8</sup> Modern psychologists accept this axiom. Psychologists know that a man/woman must feel a very real part of some group before he/she lives a normal, wholesome life.

Homer E.J. Elford, in his book, I Will Uphold the Church, says the English word "attend" comes from a Latin root which means to "stretch". Thus,

...to uphold the church with our presence is to enter into an experience which provides opportunities for growth. It should find us "growing in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>John Baillie. The Sense of the Presence of God (New York: Scribner, 1962), p. 97.

<sup>9</sup>Homer E.J. Elford. I Will Uphold the Church (Nashville: Tidings), p. 9.



The worshipping congregation is God's way of providing this important necessity for all people. But it can be of little help unless we are faithful participants in the corporate worship experience. Our being in worship regularly not only can help us change and grow individually, but it can be a real help to other members of the congregation as they, too, seek to change and grow in the Christian faith. By joining our voices in song, in prayer, in reaffirming the creeds of the church, we become God's instrument in strengthening, correcting, and sustaining the private life of each worshipper, as well as proving ourselves to be faithful members of Christ's Church.

Faithful participation in the church can directly affect the member's perceptions of the church.

Factor Two: Possibilities for Change. Membership in The United Methodist Church focuses upon the possibilities of change through faithful participation.

John's Gospel reports that while Jesus was attending the Passover, in his early ministry, a member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus, visited him. The Jewish ruler came "by night" (John 3:2), cautious and perplexed. Nicodemus came to inquire the way to the Kingdom of God. Jesus told him that admission to the Kingdom of God would require an absolute transformation of his nature, an utter rebirth.

This incident points out two important considerations. The first is the need of human nature to be different from what it is. Several things could have convinced Nicodemus

that he had attained: his status, wealth, and a reputation for piety. Yet, for all this, Nicodemus must have been dissatisfied with his religious state to have sought out the Nazarene. His journey "at night" hints at moral timidity, while the reference to darkness symbolizes the murkiness of his understanding of spiritual matters. He came to Christ out of his insufficiency, hoping to hasten the dawning of a new and better life. Nicodemus was seeking a way to change his life, in order to be fit for the Kingdom of God.

Sometimes the lack of knowledge, virtue, and religious satisfaction are the conditions raising our consciousness of insufficiency. Carl Rogers, the distinguished psychiatrist, summing up his impressions of more than a quarter-century's contact with troubled people, affirms that the core difficulty of the great majority is that they despise themselves.<sup>10</sup> While often they hide their condition behind facades of pretension (Nicodemus sought to cloak his need in darkness), they have the consciousness that their life is not what it should be. They crave help. They wish they could reverse the days that are gone and begin again. They may not speak in the religious idiom of sin and guilt. They may not employ the vocabulary of the moralist. But they know they "have done

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<sup>10</sup>F. Gerald Ensley. Persons Can Change (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1963), p. 11.

things they should not have done."<sup>11</sup> They wish they could start over again.

The second fact the ancient tale of Nicodemus and the Lord points out is: the Gospel answers the natural urge for change by saying that we can and must change. Jesus told the Pharisee that entrance into the Kingdom of God involves a new birth, a starting over, a renewal of being, whereby old things pass away. Since it would be folly for Christ to require a change of nature, if it were impossible, the divine "must" implies a human "can".

Christianity is pre-eminently a religion of change. The dominant note of the Gospel is redemption - change for the better. The term "gospel" means the good news of the saving purpose of God. The Gospel proclaims that no man/woman need stay the way he/she is. Scriptures record those who have experienced this redemptive action. The church is the company of those "who are being saved" (Acts 2:47).

The basic tendency of life is to move forward toward maturity. To assert, as we sometimes do in a pessimistic mood, that "human nature never changes" may be countered by the more accurate observation that it is the very nature of human nature to change.

The mightiest weapon of Christian apologetics has been the miracles of transformation effected through the divine

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<sup>11</sup>"Prayer of General Confession," Communion Ritual taken from The Hymnal of The Evangelical United Brethren Church (Dayton, OH: The Board of Publication, 1955), p. 15.

power released in Jesus Christ. People who have been enslaved in greed, hate, and lust, have become gentle, affectionate, servants of others through the love of God.

To belong to the church of Jesus Christ is to become a part of a community whose very purpose is to bring about a transformation of life. The avowed purpose of The United Methodist Church is to change men/women for the better - in the language of traditional theology, to save their souls.

A change in our life and perceptions of self and the church are possible as we are confronted by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Factor Three: Nurturing. The United Methodist Church places upon its members the need to be a nurturing people.

The Discipline states (§252.1a):

The work area chairperson of nurture and membership care is responsible for the planning and implementation of programs to aid the spiritual growth of persons within the congregation.<sup>12</sup>

The United Methodist Church sees itself as a nurturing, shepherding community that reaches outside itself. To provide direction and encouragement for everyone is the intent of a nurturing community. However, the church must not demand that people come into the community of faith before they are ready to make the commitment such a life demands.

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<sup>12</sup>The Discipline, p. 136.

The church is to the life of the spirit what the school is to the training of the mind. It is the established agency for religious and moral nurture. The church holds before men/women the challenge of the highest ideals and endeavors to surround them with an environment favorable to his/her growth.

The church must be eager and able to nurture and shepherd anybody whose life is awakened and who wants to be confronted by the demands of the gospel. The church must be able to give guidance and inspiration to anybody who, having been confronted by Christ and responding to this faith, is eager to move on to the stage where he/she will (1) be stabilized in the faith, (2) grow into maturity in the faith, and (3) discover his/her gift of the Holy Spirit. The intention of a nurturing community will be to shepherd individuals in their spiritual development.

Through nurture, perceptions of the church can be changed positively.

Factor Four: Action. The United Methodist Church calls its members into action. Ronn Kerr states the true church is identifiable as one that is, at the same time, both "proclaiming" the good news of God's love and "demonstrating" God's love in its action.<sup>13</sup> This thought suggests the church is not about just any type of action, but Christian action.

The action desired of members is set forth in The

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<sup>13</sup>Ronn Kerr. Big Christian Ideas (Nashville: Ronn Kerr Associates), p. 48.

Discipline (¶214):

Each member is to identify with the agony and suffering of the world and to radiate and exemplify the Christ of hope.<sup>14</sup>

Through empathy, the church takes on some segment of the pain and hurt of mankind and will, in the name of Christ, go to it for its healing.

Based on this statement of The Discipline, each member of The United Methodist Church should strive to offer a vision of hope to the world. The vision the church presents the world asserts that all mankind is one, and one day all mankind will be consciously in the love of God. This is the vision, for the lack of which the people perish. By coupling this vision with Christian action, the church enables people to see that life can and will be different because God is God.

The United Methodist Church stresses all four of these factors. As the individual member and the congregation prove faithful to its Lord, The United Methodist Church will always seek to deepen these factors so a person can grow into fullness of life.

Summary

To summarize the discussion of this chapter, we find that perceptions are the result of three factors. First, perceptions are initiated by interpersonal encounters. Two types of perceptions are formed through these encounters:

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<sup>14</sup>The Discipline, p. 115.

(a) perception of others, and (b) self-perceptions, which are based on the expectations of others. Second, perceptions are derived, in part, from interpretations of the encounters. Like active listening, interpretations can be affected by verbal and nonverbal activity (i.e., not only words, but through body language, such as gestures, facial expressions, posture, etc.). Third, as a result of our encounters and interpretations, feelings are generated. Through feelings, evaluations of others follow. The outcome of encounters, interpretations, and feelings is the formation of our perceptions.

Perceptions are important to the process of interaction since they are one of the determinants of behavior. Perceptions underlie our motives as we search for meaning and values.

In order to evaluate perceptions members hold of the local United Methodist Church, we viewed four factors which are emphasized by The United Methodist denomination. The four factors include: (1) the importance of faithful participation in the church. Active participation affords the possibilities of further change and growth. (2) The United Methodist Church focuses upon possible change within the member's life. Correspondingly, the local church should be a laboratory of change. (3) The local church has a responsibility to nurture its members. An intentional nurturing ministry should include giving guidance and inspiration, encouragement and support to all who respond to the claims of

the Gospel. And (4) The United Methodist Church is a church of Christian action. Members are challenged to empathize with the world's needs and then meet those needs.

In conclusion, The United Methodist Church endeavors to present itself as a church where individuals can grow into the fullness of life.

Having discussed the listening process (Chapter 2), barriers to active listening (Chapter 3), perception formation and factors figuring into perception formation of the local church (Chapter 4), we now turn our attention to the relationship of perceptions and active listening among members at Trinity United Methodist Church.



Chapter 5  
**THE RELATIONSHIP OF  
PERCEPTIONS AND ACTIVE LISTENING**

The major principles of research have been stated. Those principles have guided the researcher in seeking data pertinent to this Dissertation. The results are shared to illustrate the relationship of active listening and the perceptions church members have of their church.

This chapter focuses on the members' (1) self-perceptions; (2) perceptions of Trinity United Methodist Church, based on a representative sample from the congregation; (3) the listening skills of members, and (4) the relationship of perceptions and active listening. The goal of this chapter is to summarize and assess the data secured.

Description of Instruments

For the purposes of this study, two instruments were administered to secure data relevant to perceptions and active listening.

The first instrument, a seven-point Likert Scale Perception Checklist, was designed to measure the perceptions of self and the local church held by a sample group. The scale consisted of poor perceptions (1 being the lowest response) and excellent perceptions (7 being the highest response). (See Appendix A for a sample of the Perception Checklist).

The second instrument administered was the Jones-Mohr

Listening Test (see Appendix C). The Jones-Mohr Listening Test (available through University Associates, San Diego, California) is designed as a 30-item test to secure data on efficiency of active listening. Four varying responses to each statement allows the listener to identify the degree of accuracy in listening. The overall ranking of the responses, as designated by Jones-Mohr, can be found in Appendix D. The listening frequency and percentages of responses to the Jones-Mohr Listening Test appear as Table 1.

Both the Jones-Mohr Listening Test and the Perception Checklist were administered by the author on July 15, 1987, at Trinity United Methodist Church, Bowling Green, Ohio. The intent was to test the assumptions of this paper. The major questions being investigated focused upon (1) how members perceive themselves, (2) what perceptions members have of their church, (3) how well members exercise their listening skills, and (4) the relationship of active listening and perceptions. The results of the analyses are the basis of the following discussion.

#### Self-Perceptions

As discussed in Chapter 4, self-perceptions can affect the perceptions one person has of another person or group of persons. Data gathered from participants relevant to self-perceptions follows.

Questions 1-14, of the Perception Checklist, focus upon self-perceptions. Table 2 serves as a point of discussion.

Table 1

## Listening Frequency and Percentages

<u>Listening</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
12	1	3.3
14	2	6.7
15	1	3.3
16	3	10.0
17	3	10.0
18	3	10.0
19	7	23.3
20	4	13.3
21	2	6.7
23	1	3.3
25	2	6.7
26	1	3.3

Table 2  
Rating of Self-Perception

Question	Rating of Perceptions			
	Poor 1-3	Fair 3-4	Good 5-6	Excellent 7
	Number of Responses			
1. Awareness of the feelings of others. (Awareness)	1	3	21	5
2. Tendency to trust others. (Trust)	2	6	20	2
3. Tendency to seek close personal relationship with others. (Closeness)	1	12	14	3
4. Willingness to listen to others in an understanding way. (Willingness to listen)	0	3	21	6
5. Reaction to expression of affection and warmth from others. (Affection from others)	0	8	17	5
6. Willingness to discuss feelings and emotions with others. (Feeling)	2	12	11	5
7. Level of self-understanding. (Self-understanding)	0	4	22	4
8. Level of self-esteem. (Self-esteem)	2	9	16	2
9. Level of giving love. (Affection toward others)	2	5	17	6
10. Level of openness to others. (Openness)	1	12	14	3
11. Degree of peace of mind. (Peace of mind)	2	4	22	2

## Rating of Perceptions

Question

12. Clarity in expressing thoughts.  
(Self-expression)
13. Can, at this moment, articulate  
clearly and concisely my beliefs  
about God, sin, salvation, resurrec-  
tion, trinity, eternal life.  
(Clarity of expression)
14. Rating my current relationship with  
Christ, in terms of closeness.  
(Relationship with Christ)

	Poor 1-2	Fair 3-4	Good 5-6	Excellent 7
	Number of Responses			
12. Clarity in expressing thoughts. (Self-expression)	1	12	13	5
13. Can, at this moment, articulate clearly and concisely my beliefs about God, sin, salvation, resurrec- tion, trinity, eternal life. (Clarity of expression)	1	10	15	3
14. Rating my current relationship with Christ, in terms of closeness. (Relationship with Christ)	3	6	17	4

By placing the participants' responses into categories (7 excellent, 5-6 good, 3-4 fair, and 1-2 poor), this figure indicates that most individuals perceive themselves within the "good" level of self-perception. The basic personal traits include: awareness, trust, closeness, willingness to discuss feelings/emotions, self-understanding, self-esteem, giving love to others, openness, peace of mind, self-expression, clarity of expression, and the individual's relationship to Christ. With the exception of the last characteristic, all these traits are critical to the listening and communication process.

A closer examination of the data indicates that the areas of closeness, feeling, openness, and self-expression border on the "fair" range. These four areas, which can be viewed as pertaining to relationships and self-disclosure, are significant. Relationships and self-disclosure have a definite bearing on the way members perceive their church.

The Perception Checklist, therefore, reveals that members tested perceive of themselves within the "good" range.

#### Perceptions of the Church

Questions 15-28, on the Perception Checklist, focus upon perceptions of Trinity United Methodist Church (see Table 3). Characteristics treated were: working together, trust of leadership/others, unity, harmony, people made to feel welcome, everyone welcome (inclusion), openness/honesty,

Table 3  
Rating of Perceptions of the Church

<u>Question</u>	Rating of Perceptions			
	1-2 Poor	3-4 Fair	5-6 Good	7 Excellent
	<u>Number of Responses</u>			
15. People in this church work together effectively. (Work together)	2	9	17	1
16. Everyone here trusts the leadership and each other. (Trust)	0	14	13	2
17. In this church, we take on tasks so large that we could only succeed if we pulled together and God was with us. (Unity)	1	8	18	3
18. The regular active members really seem to like and enjoy each other. (Harmony)	1	2	18	9
19. New people who join or visit are really welcomed and they feel wanted and included in the life and fellowship of this church. (Anyone welcome)	0	10	14	5
20. ANYONE is welcome to visit and join our church, and would be invited to do so if they are interested. (Anyone welcome)	0	2	15	13
21. Openness and honesty in personal relationships are encouraged and affirmed here. (Openness/honesty)	0	4	18	7
22. Our people care for hurting, struggling persons, and we have intentional ways of expressing that care in ministry or programs. (Caring)	1	3	18	7

Rating of Perceptions

Question

23. When there is a conflict of ideas or feelings, people feel they are heard and conflicts are faced and resolved with good will intact. (Conflict resolution)
24. If I couldn't come for several Sundays, I would be missed and visited or called by some member. (Visitation)
25. The music in this church is singable and inspiring. (Music)
26. The preaching and teaching in this church are in the common language of the people. (Preaching/Teaching)
27. In recent memory, at least one worship service has been exciting and moving, with a sense of God's presence. (Worship)
28. A number of people in this church experience, or want to experience the grace of God, and there are opportunities to talk about, seek, and share Christian experiences. (Experience God's grace)

	Rating of Perceptions			
	Poor 1-2	Fair 3-4	Good 5-6	Excellent 7
	<u>Number of Responses</u>			
	1	13	14	4
	6	13	10	1
	1	7	18	4
	1	2	15	12
	1	2	17	9
	0	5	17	8



caring, conflict resolution, visitation (i.e., those members not attending over a period of time), music, preaching/teaching, worship experience, and the experiencing of God's grace.

Responses to Questions 15-28 indicate the perceptions of the church fall within the "good" range. A closer examination of Table 3, however, reveals that three areas (trust of leadership/others, conflict resolution, and intentional visitation of members not attending) actually rank "fair", with one critical area: visitation. The total number of responses given this characteristic reveals that 19 respondents perceive their church as either "poor" or "fair", with 11 respondents rating the church "good" to "excellent".

To bring about change, both within the individual and the congregation, this data demonstrates a need for the local church to take seriously the responsibility of nurturing its members (as discussed in Chapter 5). While fulfillment of church membership vows rests primarily with the individual member, the church cannot avoid its responsibility to all members. Attention must be given especially to those members lapsing into inactivity and who might eventually be lost as a part of the church.

The visitation factor, the weakest of all areas, can be corrected by applying active listening. Through a visitation program, the active members must address these questions: Do we know "why" these people feel as they do? Do we know "why" these people are not attending? What programs or changes in

ministry are necessary to restore the inactive members to faithful participation in the church (as discussed in Chapter 5)? By applying the listening process, and by reducing any existing barriers (discussed in Chapters 2 and 3), the church will learn answers to these questions. As a result, different programming and changes may be necessary to assure that all members ("active" and "inactive") are nurtured and enabled to carry out their membership vows (see Chapter 5).

Another revelation provided by the data (by cross-checking self-perceptions and perceptions of the church) shows what appears to be a contradiction in responses. Members view themselves as having a "good" trust level, while these same individuals do not perceive the church where trust can be manifested in either the leadership or each other. This is a critical concern. The reason focuses upon the fact that listening and communication must be predicated upon a foundation of trust. If not, the listening process is rendered ineffective. Without effective, active listening, the possibilities for change and growth will be negated.

A fourth important finding (again by cross-checking self-perceptions with perceptions of the church) indicates an incongruity in the area of conflict resolution. While individuals perceive themselves to be "willing listeners" and according to the Jones-Mohr Listening Test are "good" listeners, the data indicates more people perceive the church as "fair" when dealing with conflict. The importance of this issue centers upon the fact that active listening, when properly used, should help reduce and/or resolve conflict. Active

listening aids in the changing of perceptions held by individuals, which can contribute to conflict resolution.

Active listening encourages the expression of feelings, ideas, perceptions, rather than a repression of them. Often conflict arises at this point. Active listening neither pre-judges nor condemns; rather it is open to the possibility of self-expression, whether or not the listener and speaker agree. The outcome should be mutual understanding and respect, even though perceptions may be quite different. The desired goal of active listening should be one of enabling individuals and/or groups to resolve areas of conflict. Without the resolution of conflict, change will not be possible.

This response further suggests a possible relationship of active listening and perceptions as determinants of involvement by church members, which could be an area for future research. However, this relationship does not directly apply to this study.

Active listening both provides the opportunities for and is predicated upon the characteristics enumerated under this portion of the Perception Checklist. Without these elements, there remains little hope for change in perceptions.

#### Church Members' Listening Skills

How well do the members tested exercise their listening skills? Initially it must be recognized that in all types of human relations, a need exists to develop effective communication skills. Whether an individual is teaching a Sunday

school class, interacting in a study group or church organization, or attempting to communicate through preaching, the focus of the communicator is upon three basic skills: self-expression, listening, and responding. Listening is the core skill in interpersonal relations. Skill building in this key area should be included in as many human relations training activities as possible.

The Jones-Mohr Listening Test offers evaluative meanings for the scores achieved: 23-30 excellent, 15-22 good, 7-14 fair, and 0-6 poor.

[Following the administration of the listening test, a brief time was given for discussion with the test group. Participants were helped to identify cues for recognizing various emotional states represented in the test. Possible cues are discussed in Chapter 2 of this Dissertation.]

The results of the listening test ranged from 3 participants accurately identifying 12-14 responses correctly (fair listeners), to 3 participants accurately identifying 24-26 responses (excellent listeners). The remaining participants (24 in all) tested as good listeners - accurately identifying 15-22 responses.

Based on these figures, the majority of the participants rank as good listeners. Therefore, we find from the data that the members do exercise their listening skills effectively.

#### The Relationship of Perceptions and Active Listening

From our discussion on the nature and role of perceptions

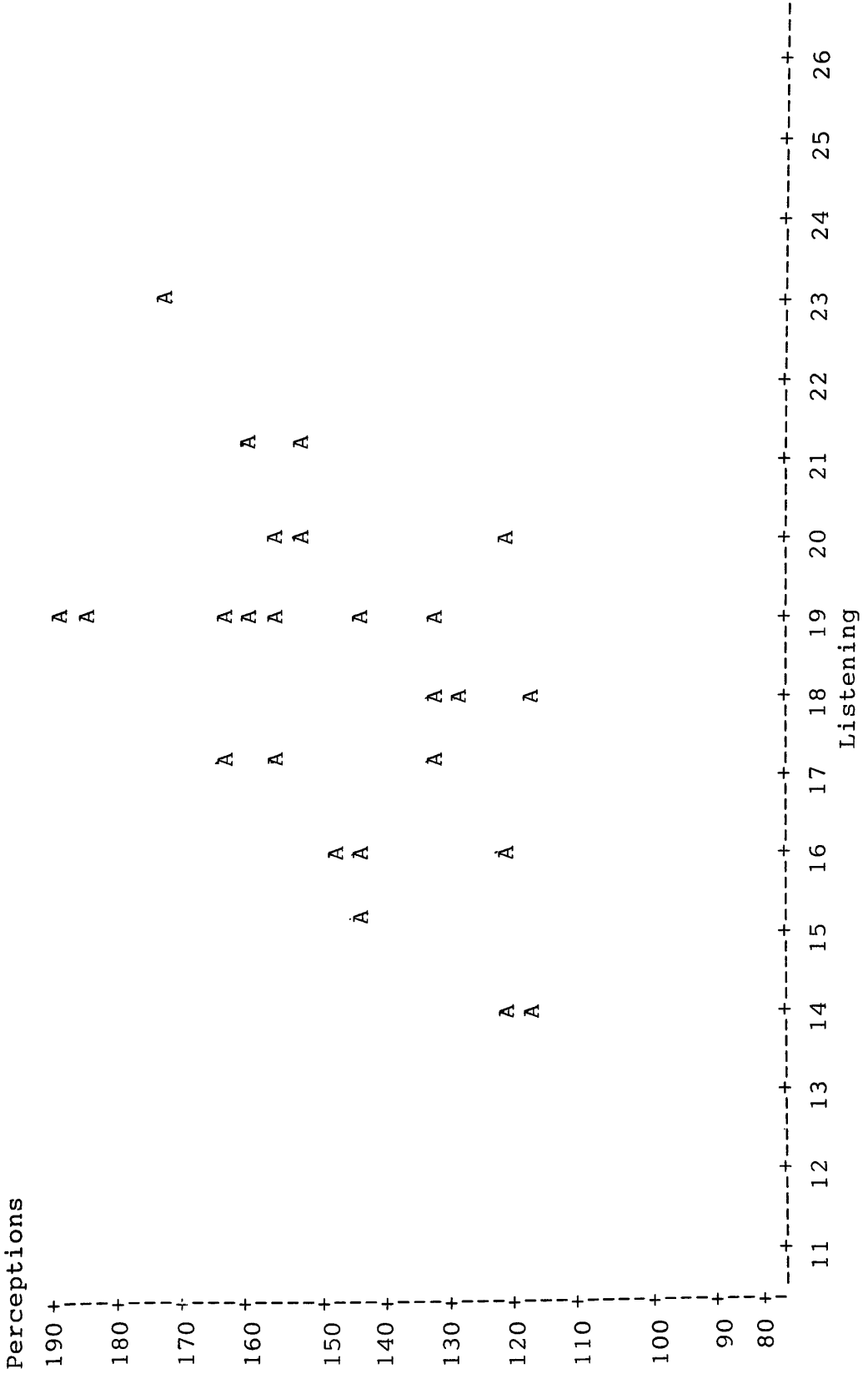
in Chapter 4, we infer the nature of things and persons from appearances they present to us. This is the role of perceptions. Perception is the first condition necessary for developing understanding. When understanding is present in the mind of the individual, attitudes are regulated and efforts are guided in interpersonal communication. Thus, as we perceive, so we act. Our behavior is regulated to a degree by our perceptions.

What is the relationship of perceptions and listening behavior among the members tested? Figure 6 represents the relationship of active listening and perceptions of the members.

To assist in interpreting Figure 6, two points of clarification are needed. First, a close examination of the plot reveals only 25 responses, whereas 30 members participated in the testing. The difference results from 5 sets of instruments being invalidated, due to those sets not being gathered properly.

The second point of clarification concerns interpretation of the numbers assigned to the plot. The horizontal line represents the number of correct responses given the 30-item Jones-Mohr Listening Test. Each respondent has been plotted on the basis of his/her number of correct responses. The vertical numbers represent the level of perceptions. The level of perceptions is determined by multiplying the total score of the 7-point Likert Scale by 28 (the number of questions on the Perception Checklist).

Figure 6  
Plot of Perceptions and Listening



Thus, by combining the level of perception and the correct number of listening responses, we derive the relationship of perceptions and active listening for each member tested.

From the information on the plot (Figure 6), we conclude that with an increase in the effectiveness of one's listening skills, there appears to be a corresponding rise in the level of perceptions. The lower the listening skills, the lower the perceptions of the church; conversely, the higher the listening skills, the higher are the members' perceptions.

One goal of active listening is the establishment of mutual understanding. If persons are to break through their isolation and communicate, they must meet at some common point of understanding. Common understanding provides a sense of community. Without a sense of community there is no communication. The importance of community is what people come to mean to one another, and the needs or concerns they seek to satisfy in community sharing. Through the development of community, the level of perceptions will increase positively both toward self and the church. This positive increase will be in proportion to the increase of effective listening to one another as demonstrated by Figure 6.

There can, however, be a frustration of community life. The frustration stems from the difficulty in communicating deeper feelings and meanings (or perceptions) to one another. Data from the Perception Checklist verifies this difficulty. At this point an urgent problem in communication arises. How shall we trust others enough to be open selves, free to

communicate our deeper needs and values? The key to open communication is a good relationship in which we perceive others to be understanding and accepting. This perception is clearly held by the members. Only by mutual understanding and confidence are we able to bare the soul in open communication.

In order to have open communication, we must be morally responsible persons who speak the truth, believe the best, and act predictably in trustworthy ways. This kind of responsibility forms the moral basis for communication. Without such responsibility, maintaining open channels for human understanding is impossible. The members tested perceive themselves in the "good" range of trusting others.

An aim of the Christian faith is to enlarge the range of our conscious perceptions. As we enlarge our perceptions, we (1) become aware of significant relationships, and (2) come to a deeper understanding of the meaning of life, in the fuller realization of its potential. As listening skills are used more effectively the level of perceptions will change accordingly. Active listening helps a person change by realizing more of his/her potential. Such change can occur through worship experiences, working together to achieve common goals, and by a sense of openness and honesty.

The decisive question is always: How do we relate to other persons? The poorer the relationship, the less meaning we have to communicate. Conversely, the better the relationship, the more values we are able to develop. This is evident



from the relationship of active listening and perceptions as noted in Figure 6. In addition, values multiply as we (1) learn from each other, (2) learn to appreciate each other, and (3) realize the values we can share with each other. Whether we suffer together in compassion or rejoice together in communion, we are blessed by a companionship of mutual understanding and love. Through this companionship we are able to communicate.

Vital to good communication is the ability to listen actively. Without active listening real communication is distorted at best. Without active listening achieving a sense of real community is impossible. Without active listening and the presence of real community, our perceptions can be distorted and remain unchanged. The church must establish this quality of community among the body of believers. The fruit of such a community helps establish God's kingdom "on earth as in heaven". Community begins with perceptions of self and the church and evolves as we learn to listen actively and effectively to one another.

#### Summary

In summary, two instruments (a Perception Checklist and the Jones-Mohr Listening Test) provided valuable data for determining the relationship of perceptions and active listening among church members.

The Perception Checklist, focusing upon self-perceptions

and perceptions of the local church, included traits which are also crucial to active listening. Members tested clearly placed in the "good" range for both types of perceptions. However, some weaknesses were revealed. The weak areas in self-perception included: closeness, feeling, openness, and self-expression. Weaknesses in perceptions of the church included: nurturing, visitation, trust, and resolving conflict. These perceptions need attention as they can have a direct relationship to active listening.

The Jones-Mohr Listening Test provided data indicating the members, overall, are good listeners. The plotting of perceptions and active listening (Table 6) revealed a parallel relationship of perceptions and active listening. In other words, the more effective the use of listening skills, the higher the level of perceptions formed.

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSIONS

The intent of this chapter is to draw conclusions covering the entire scope of the Project/Dissertation. This effort includes summarizing, reflecting on the research presented throughout the study, stating the chief findings, and offering the writer's evaluation and projections for further research.

#### A Brief Statement of The Problem

The problem addressed in this study focused upon the relationship of active listening and perceptions by members of Trinity United Methodist Church. In order to make a determination of the relationship, several steps were required. Through investigative research, knowledge was needed concerning (1) the listening process and barriers to active listening; (2) the process by which perceptions are formed; and (3) factors which figure into the responsibilities of members in The United Methodist tradition. For the purposes of acquiring data on perceptions and effective listening among members, two instruments were administered. Through the use of a Perception Checklist and the Jones-Mohr Listening Test, data was obtained for evaluating the relationship of perceptions and active listening.

#### Brief Description of the Research Methodology

The goal of acquiring knowledge and data pertinent to this study was approached through (1) self-management

workshops ("How to Manage Yourself and Your Spiritual Life"), (2) investigative research, and (3) the administration of a listening test and perception checklist to a random sample of the local congregation. The progressive steps were as follows:

1. Concern over the relationship of perceptions and active listening, as these effect change for the individual and the local church, has guided the writer in his approach to ministry and outreach to people.

2. A series of 10 "mini" workshops on "How to Manage Yourself and Your Spiritual Life" were conducted for the purpose of enabling participants to make improvements in their life.

3. Reading materials relevant to the listening process, perceptions, change, and the role of the church in the change process was begun to formulate ideas and directions to be explored, as relating to the Project/Dissertation.

4. Investigative research was done in psychology, organizational behavior and development, theology, and the Scriptures.

5. Elements from these systems formed the foundation for developing a Perception Checklist to determine perceptions of the local church by a random sample of its members.

6. The need for testing listening efficiency resulted in securing and administering the Jones-Mohr Listening Test.

7. A random sample of the church membership was secured

for testing listening skills and responding to the Perception Checklist.

8. The final step involved evaluating the research which is presented in this Dissertation.

The major findings of this Project/Dissertation came from the Scriptures, psychology, theology, organizational behavior and development, as well as two instruments.

The writers of organizational behavior and development offered the following:

1. Communication consumes a major portion of the individual's time.

2. Listening (the chief element of communication) is a crucial vehicle for learning.

3. One must listen not only to content but also for emotion and understanding.

4. Listening to one another requires commitment and may at times prove difficult.

5. Individuals can develop the ability to listen.

6. By improving one's listening ability, the individual's life can be changed.

7. Active listening can result in change for the speaker, the listener, or both.

8. Listening involves an increasing awareness and understanding of self and others.

9. Many barriers can prevent active listening, thus blocking opportunities for change and growth.

The proponents of psychology offered some beneficial concepts:

1. Communication and listening are largely the result of perceptions held by an individual.

2. Effective listening demands empathy on the part of the listener.

3. To relate in a healthy way to others, the individual must discover him/herself.

4. Relationships will progress only to the level individuals are willing to disclose themselves to others.

5. The possibilities for the occurrence of change, growth, and relationships come through love.

The writers of the Scriptures suggested:

1. Christ Himself viewed the church as an effecter of change.

2. As Christians we are called to be active participants in the corporate life of the church, exposing ourselves to the possibilities of change in our perceptions.

3. Human nature can and must change.

4. Christianity is a religion of change.

5. As members of the "body of Christ" we have a responsibility to participate in the change process.

The theologians offered some major precepts:

1. The role of membership in the local church plays an important part in perceptions of the church and possible change in perceptions and individuals.

2. To have a better understanding of the local church, four factors of membership in The United Methodist Church were explored: (a) faithful participation of members; (b) possibilities for change through active participation; (c) nurturing of members by the local church; and (d) the church's need to proclaim and demonstrate God's love through Christian action.

3. How the member perceives him/herself can determine his/her perceptions of the local church.

4. The desire for change must be coupled with the faith that it is possible to change one's perceptions, through active listening, and thereby change his/her life.

### Conclusions

This section will be devoted to major conclusions reached in this Project/Dissertation by (a) identifying strengths and weaknesses, (b) determining the validity of the research questions, and (c) giving some projections for the future use of this research.

#### Major Conclusions

The major conclusions reached are:

1. Through investigative research, an understandable knowledge of the listening process, barriers to active listening and corresponding solutions can be acquired from a study of organizational behavior and development.

2. Through investigative research, an understanding of perceptions and the effect of perceptions upon the possibil-

ities of change can be acquired from psychology and the Scriptures.

3. Instruments, such as a Perception Checklist and the Jones-Mohr Listening Test, provide valuable information for determining the relationship of perceptions and active listening.

4. As a result of this study, several areas of weaknesses in the local church were pointed out.

5. While we cannot state conclusively, based on the amount of data gathered, that a relationship of active listening and perceptions does exist, yet evidence does tend to confirm a parallel relationship between active listening and perceptions.

#### Evaluating the Overall Project

1. The scope of this study involved an investigation of the theoretical base of psychology, organizational behavior and development, theology, and the Scriptures related to perceptions of self and the church as these relate to the listening skills of church members.

2. The study raised issues and concerns which could not be addressed within the limitations of one Project/Dissertation.

3. This study has proved beneficial by providing clues for strengthening the intentional ministries of the local church.

4. This study has aroused a greater awareness to the seriousness of membership vows and the need to address some



perceptions which may be incongruent with The Discipline of The United Methodist Church.

5. Through the project and study, a foundation has been laid for continued study and refinement of programs which will, in the future, enable the local church to fulfill its purpose and mission in the community, based on perceptions and active listening.

#### Identifying the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project

The strengths of this Project were:

1. A basic understanding of the role of perceptions and active listening has been explored through various disciplines which formed the theoretical framework of the study.

2. The study has provided information to help evaluate the present ministry of the church and suggest possibilities of new ministries that would nurture members so they can fulfill their obligations as United Methodists, according to The Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 1984.

3. An understanding of the perceptions of the church by members has been obtained which will prove helpful in future programs, studies, and formation of groups allowing change to occur in the lives of the members.

4. The study has brought attention to the need of strengthening the members' listening abilities and help develop stronger, more positive perceptions of the church, through a greater awareness of what Christ expects of the members of His body.

The weaknesses of this Project were:

1. The use of a questionnaire in a face-to-face setting may have provided additional insights not afforded through the Perception Checklist.

2. In-depth workshops on active listening and perceptions would have been helpful in providing additional input for this study.

3. Addressing the issues of involvement and commitment were not possible due to the limitations of time and standards of length of the dissertation prescribed for this study.

4. A more accurate instrument for the measuring of perceptions was needed.

#### The Validity of The Research Questions

The questions guiding this research have proved valid. The questions proposed for this study were answered. General concepts regarding perceptions, active listening, and barriers to listening, which facilitate change, were stated. A simple Perception Checklist was designed to determine how members perceive themselves in relation to their church and how the level of perceptions corresponds with active listening.

#### Projections for the Future

Suggestions for future programs relating to perceptions,

active listening, and the relationship to greater levels of involvement are as follows:

1. In-depth workshops on developing listening skills were needed.

2. In-depth workshops on perceptions would prove helpful in identifying weaknesses in the local church's ministry.

3. The local church needs to provide leadership and training to incorporate a nurturing, shepherding program for its members.

4. Church members need to be trained in listening in order to achieve an intentional ministry of outreach to both the "inactive" members of the church and the unchurched within the local community.

5. A program with greater emphasis on the meaning of membership in The United Methodist Church needs to be developed prior to the reception of communicants into the local church.

#### Concluding Comments

This Project/Dissertation has proven valuable to the writer and the congregation where he serves as the Senior Pastor. An initial awareness of how members perceive their church causes the writer to want to press for a serious evaluation of the church's programs in order to achieve an intentional, supportive ministry to all the members. Research in the areas of perception and listening has sensitized the writer to the need for continued improvement in his own

listening skills and understandings, as well as those of the congregation.

While this study is viewed as a first step in enhancing the ministry of the local church, it clearly shows the need for on-going research, study, and the implementation of programs that will effect change in people, resulting in a healthier church.

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Appendix A

DIRECTIONS: Complete this section quickly, without thinking too much about each item.

1. Awareness of the feelings of others.  
Unaware - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Aware
2. Tendency to trust others.  
Quite Suspicious - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Trusting
3. Tendency to seek close personal relationships with others.  
Low - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - High
4. Willingness to listen to others in an understanding way.  
Low - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - High
5. Reaction to expression of affection and warmth from others.  
Low Tolerance - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - High Tolerance
6. Willingness to discuss feelings and emotions with others.  
Unwilling - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Willing
7. Level of self understanding.  
Doesn't Know Self - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Knows Self A Great Deal
8. Level of self esteem.  
Very low - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Very High
9. Level of giving love.  
Cold - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Warm and Affectionate
10. Level of openness to others.  
Reveals Little of Self - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Reveals Much of Self
11. Degree of peace of mind.  
Restless and Dissatisfied - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - At Peace With Self
12. Clarity in expressing thoughts.  
Quite Vague - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Very Clear
13. Can, at this moment, articulate clearly and concisely my beliefs about God, sin, salvation, resurrection, trinity, eternal life.  
Not at all Clear or Concise - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Very Clearly and Concisely

14. Rating my current relationship with Christ, in terms of closeness.

Not Close  
At All - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Very Close

15. People in this church work together effectively.

Very In-  
Effective - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Very Effective

16. Everyone here trusts the leadership and each other.

Very  
Distrusting - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Very Trusting

17. In this church, we take on tasks so large that we could only succeed if we pulled together and God was with us.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly Agree

18. The regular active members really seem to like and enjoy each other.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly Agree

19. New people who join or visit are really welcomed and they feel wanted and included in the life and fellowship of this church.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly Agree

20. ANYONE is welcome to visit or join our church, and would be invited to do so if they were interested.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly Agree

21. Openness and honesty in personal relationships is encouraged and affirmed here.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly Agree

22. Our people care for hurting, struggling persons, and we have intentional ways of expressing that care in ministry or program.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly Agree

23. When there is a conflict of ideas or feelings, people feel they are heard and conflicts are faced and resolved with good will intact.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly Agree

24. If I couldn't come for several Sundays, I would be missed and visited or called by some member.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly  
Agree

25. The music in this church is singable and inspiring.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly  
Agree

26. The preaching and teaching in this church are in the common language of the people.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly  
Agree

27. In recent memory, at least one worship service has been exciting and moving, with a sense of God's presence.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly  
Agree

28. A number of people in this church experience, or want to experience the grace of God, and there are opportunities to talk about, seek, and share such Christian experience.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly  
Agree

Appendix B

DIRECTIONS: Complete this section quickly, without thinking too much about each item.

1. Awareness of the feelings of others.  
Unaware - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Aware  
5.46
2. Tendency to trust others.  
Quite Suspicious - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Trusting  
5.1
3. Tendency to seek close personal relationships with others.  
Low - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - High  
4.8
4. Willingness to listen to others in an understanding way.  
Low - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - High  
5.62
5. Reaction to expression of affection and warmth from others.  
Low Tolerance - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - High Tolerance  
5.2
6. Willingness to discuss feelings and emotions with others.  
Unwilling - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Willing  
4.7
7. Level of self understanding.  
Doesn't Know Self - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Knows Self A Great Deal  
5.53
8. Level of self esteem.  
Very low - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Very High  
4.96
9. Level of giving love.  
Cold - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Warm and Affectionate  
5.16
10. Level of openness to others.  
Reveals Little of Self - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Reveals Much of Self  
4.7
11. Degree of peace of mind.  
Restless and Dissatisfied - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - At Peace With Self  
5.1
12. Clarity in expressing thoughts.  
Quite Vague - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Very Clear  
4.9
13. Can, at this moment, articulate clearly and concisely my beliefs about God, sin, salvation, resurrection, trinity, eternal life.  
Not at all Clear or Concise - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Very Clearly and Concisely  
4.7

14. Rating my current relationship with Christ, in terms of closeness.

Not Close  
At All - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Very Close  
 4.9

15. People in this church work together effectively.

Very In-  
Effective - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Very  
Effective  
 4.4

16. Everyone here trusts the leadership and each other.

Very  
Distrusting - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Very  
Trusting  
 4.5

17. In this church, we take on tasks so large that we could only succeed if we pulled together and God was with us.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly  
Agree  
 4.89

18. The regular active members really seem to like and enjoy each other.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly  
Agree  
 5.78

19. New people who join or visit are really welcomed and they feel wanted and included in the life and fellowship of this church.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly  
Agree  
 5.03

20. ANYONE is welcome to visit or join our church, and would be invited to do so if they were interested.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly  
Agree  
 6.2

21. Openness and honesty in personal relationships is encouraged and affirmed here.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly  
Agree  
 5.58

22. Our people care for hurting, struggling persons, and we have intentional ways of expressing that care in ministry or program.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly  
Agree  
 5.53

23. When there is a conflict of ideas or feelings, people feel they are heard and conflicts are faced and resolved with good will intact.

Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Strongly  
Agree  
 4.79



24. If I couldn't come for several Sundays, I would be missed and visited or called by some member.

Strongly 3.7 Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Agree

25. The music in this church is singable and inspiring.

Strongly 5.1 Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Agree

26. The preaching and teaching in this church are in the common language of the people.

Strongly 6.06 Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Agree

27. In recent memory, at least one worship service has been exciting and moving, with a sense of God's presence.

Strongly 5.75 Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Agree

28. A number of people in this church experience, or want to experience the grace of God, and there are opportunities to talk about, seek, and share such Christian experience.

Strongly 5.48 Strongly  
Disagree - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - Agree

# THE JONES-MOHR LISTENING TEST: FORM A

## Appendix C

*Directions:* There are thirty items in this form of the test. A statement is read aloud twice on the tape, each time with the same intended meaning. Below each statement on the test form are four phrases. You will have ten seconds to mark the phrase that represents the intended meaning of the statement. Circle the letter to the left of the phrase you select. Do you have any questions?

1. *Let's go see him again.*
  - A. I just can't wait.
  - B. I'd like to get something from him.
  - C. I never want to see him again.
  - D. I really enjoy seeing him.
2. *Ah, I just can't seem to get involved.*
  - A. I wish I were different.
  - B. I don't want to get involved.
  - C. . . . but I want to get involved.
  - D. I'm really kind of bored.
3. *Gee! It's good to see you again.*
  - A. I really don't enjoy this.
  - B. I'm happy to see you.
  - C. I like you.
  - D. It's about time . . .
4. *It's nice to be together again.*
  - A. I've missed you so much.
  - B. It makes me feel at peace.
  - C. . . . but I liked it better without you.
  - D. I'm glad you're home.
5. *Yeah, I can really get off on that idea.*
  - A. I like it, but I'm confused.
  - B. I'm just as neat as you.
  - C. I don't want to do it.
  - D. That inspires me.
6. *She makes me jittery.*
  - A. I wish she liked me more.
  - B. . . . but I'm always that way.
  - C. I don't like her.
  - D. I'm nervous around her.
7. *I could have crawled into a hole.*
  - A. I felt so ashamed.
  - B. He made me so mad at him.
  - C. It really didn't bother me.
  - D. I was really embarrassed.
8. *I'll talk to you again tomorrow.*
  - A. I sure hope not.
  - B. I'm too sad to talk now.
  - C. (Simple statement.)
  - D. I'd like to get rid of you.
9. *You're really a fine person.*
  - A. I feel I have to say this.
  - B. Too fine, in fact.
  - C. So why not do something for me?
  - D. I admire you.
10. *I'm sure I can handle it.*
  - A. Don't bother me.
  - B. I'm quite confident of that.
  - C. I have a few doubts.
  - D. . . . but you can't.
11. *And I hope I never see you again.*
  - A. You can't treat me that way. I'm insulted.
  - B. Please come back.
  - C. You've hurt me.
  - D. You've made me angry.
12. *I can't get up for any more studying.*
  - A. I can't stand any more.
  - B. I'm becoming apathetic toward it.
  - C. . . . unless I have to.
  - D. I hate to study.
13. *I'd rather not see her.*
  - A. You understand, don't you?
  - B. Can't she keep away from me?
  - C. She disgusts me.
  - D. I'm just too good for her.
14. *I'm going to stick this thing out until it's over.*
  - A. I'm determined not to quit.
  - B. I've just got to finish.
  - C. . . . even though it may kill me.
  - D. Nobody calls me a quitter.
15. *You're so fun to be with.*
  - A. You're crazy.
  - B. I'm happy when I'm around you.
  - C. . . . but I'm no fun.
  - D. I can't stand you.
16. *I can't smile or laugh.*
  - A. . . . so just leave me alone.
  - B. I'm confused.
  - C. I feel stagnant.
  - D. I feel really sad.
17. *I'm real glad you're here.*
  - A. I'm angry because it took you so long.
  - B. I'm surprised to see you.
  - C. . . . so when are you going to leave?
  - D. It's a relief to see you.
18. *I didn't think it would end.*
  - A. It made me nervous.
  - B. I knew it was temporary.
  - C. I regret its ending.
  - D. I was surprised when it ended.
19. *You're becoming very important to me.*
  - A. She's not important anymore.
  - B. I'm frustrated that the time goes so fast when we're together.
  - C. I love you very much.
  - D. I'm jealous of him.
20. *I've been waiting for two hours.*
  - A. I've been afraid to be alone.
  - B. I was worried about you.
  - C. How long have you waited?
  - D. I'm really impatient with you.

21. I

- B. ... but I'd rather be close to you.
- C. I love him.
- D. I can't survive without him.

22. *It was quiet and still, then she walked in.*

- A. I hate her.
- B. Everyone respected and admired her.
- C. We were all very afraid.
- D. I was afraid of what she might do.

23. *I'm ready for anything Dad might ask.*

- A. I'll do whatever he says.
- B. I'm confident I can handle it.
- C. He threatens me.
- D. ... and I'll get back at him.

24. *I wish you wouldn't have pointed me out.*

- A. Thank you for pointing me out.
- B. You've got a lot of gall.
- C. Why don't you mind your own business.
- D. You embarrassed me.

25. *Nothing has gone right today.*

- A. I'm feeling depressed.
- B. ... but I'm looking forward to tomorrow.
- C. ... and it's your fault.
- D. I'm really confused.

26. *I think we'd better stop working together.*

- A. I'm too tired today.
- B. I'm getting irritated with you.
- C. ... and start playing.
- D. I'd rather work with someone else.

27. *I'm very excited for you.*

- A. ... but not all that excited.
- B. You upset me with all your excitement.
- C. Your mother is not.
- D. I'm happy for you.

28. *She doesn't have any time for me.*

- A. I'm better than her.
- B. I feel guilty for being so selfish.
- C. I'm jealous because she spends all her time with him.
- D. I feel sorry for myself.

29. *Would you please sit still?*

- A. ... you're making me nervous.
- B. I'm getting impatient with you.
- C. I'm frustrated and need you to sit still.
- D. ... don't you dare move.

30. *I thought I'd done well.*

- A. I'm mad that you don't agree.
- B. I feel good.
- C. I'm very upset.
- D. I'm surprised that I didn't do well.



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NUMBER   
CORRECT

FORM A

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Group \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



John E. Jones  
Lawrence Mohr



Appendix D

RESULTS OF THE  
JONES-MOHR LISTENING TEST

Score	Tally
30	<u>0</u>
27-29	<u>0</u>
24-26	<u>3</u>
21-23	<u>3</u>
18-20	<u>14</u>
15-17	<u>7</u>
12-14	<u>3</u>
9-11	<u>0</u>
6-8	<u>0</u>
3-5	<u>0</u>
0-2	<u>0</u>

Scale: Evaluative Meanings of Scores

23-30	Excellent
15-22	Good
7-14	Fair
0-6	Poor

## Appendix E

### SELF-MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

#### "How to Manage Yourself and Your Spiritual Life"

- Target Audience:** Open for all people in Trinity interested in further developing skills in managing their life and their spiritual growth.
- Overall Goal:** Enhance large-group fellowship and personal interaction. Promote enthusiasm and motivation.
- Objectives:** To assist participants in:  
(1) improving communications, listening, resolving interpersonal conflict, and reducing stress in life.  
(2) Time management, solving problems  
(3) Dealing with complainers and understanding individual differences, personal life values, and human relations.
- Format:** Approximately one-hour sessions with much group interaction, worksheets, discussion, and self-assessment instruments.
- Agenda:** Opening: prayer  
Learning Activities  
Reference to Scripture  
Closing: prayer
- Outline:** Session 1--Using Your Personality Style to Reduce Conflict in Life  
Session 2--Understanding Your Life Values  
Session 3--Improving Your Family Relationships Through Team Work  
Session 4--How to Communicate and Listen to People  
Session 5--Managing Stress in Life  
Session 6--Personal Organization and Time Management  
Session 7--Solving Problems in Life  
Session 8--Dealing with Complainers  
Session 9--How to Counsel People  
Session 10--left open for concentration on selected topic
- Facilitator:** Dr. Dan Tomal, Consultant and speaker for many business companies, civic groups, and professional organizations. He has given these seminars in many organizations worldwide.



*Trinity United Methodist Church*

200 NORTH SUMMIT STREET  
BOWLING GREEN, OHIO 43402

JAMES R. STEWART  
1058 CAROL ROAD

June 30, 1987

CHURCH (419) 353-9031  
PARSONAGE (419) 352-1720

Dear

As you may know, our pastor, Jim Stewart, is working on his Doctor of Ministry degree at Asbury Seminary.

To fulfill the requirement of a dissertation, your name has been selected AT RANDOM, from among our church membership, to participate in a brief survey and listening test. The survey and test will be given on Wednesday, July 15, at 7:30 p.m. at the church, in the Fellowship Hall. Both of these instruments (the survey and the test) are brief, easy to take, and require no preparation in advance. Maximum time for this will be one hour, hopefully it can be completed in 30-45 minutes.

Since it is vital to the project to have a cross sample of the congregation, you have been selected. Will you be willing to help in this project?

Again the date is: Wednesday, July 15, 1987  
7:30 p.m.  
Trinity Church Fellowship Hall.

Thank you for your help.

-----  
PLEASE - - - detach and return this form so that it will arrive into the church office by Wednesday, July 8th, or telephone 353-9031 or 352-0280. (It is imperative that each person respond:

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to participate and will be in attendance.

\_\_\_\_\_ I cannot participate.

Name \_\_\_\_\_









