

# Sister Who's Perspective

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*Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you. ---Sister Who*

## Overview

Among the words bandied about these days which seem to be little understood specifically because of the dramatic contrast between those words and the ways in which people actually live, is the word "community."

As with nearly all other words, the meanings and implications are multi-dimensional and worthy of reflection, but in the busy-ness of life this deeper look at what we say and how live, seldom gets done.

Hopefully this newsletter can provide for you a moment's pause to consider more than just the superficial use of this word; to move into greater awareness of deeper meanings and how these could have a healing effect upon everyone around us as well as the world in which we live.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

## Abusing Community

One of the earliest phrases I coined as Sister Who was that "whoever wants the muscles, must lift the weights." In considering abuses of community, my first thought is of asking communities to do something which really needs to be done by myself.

For example: regular church attendance because of what I can get rather than because of what I can give. Crises occur within everyone's life, during which the support of others is needed. Making this habitual, however, enables us to refrain from healing or resolving the root cause (or causes) of the problem. Essentially, we enable the problem to remain an active element within our lives.

Another example is the challenge of personal identity. If we are who we are only because of where we work, our membership in some cause or organization, or any other categorical label, then finding ourselves alone is more or less synonymous with ceasing to truly exist. Laborious though it may sometimes be, one of the inherent tasks of being truly alive is that of being aware of the dynamic and fluctuating essence which identifies the uniqueness of me. If I do not know the essential essence of

who I am, then any number of communities or groups will be happy to absorb my contributions to serve its goals, whether or not that has anything to do with the unique, special, and vitally important reason God made me the way I am. Ultimately, while the group's goals may be effectively served, the ministry God would have me do may be tragically neglected.

Finally, (within this article, at least) using or manipulating the community toward the expression of personal emotions which may not be adequately wholistic to support true healing of individuals or groups within humanity is also abusive. An example of this would be the vast quantities of censorship which occur within this country in the name of supposedly protecting others (especially children) from knowledge they presumably "can't handle."

Essentially, this is the enablement of weakness rather than the empowerment of individuals and groups to be both aware of and able to effectively respond to, challenging circumstances and elements which may be encountered at any time throughout life.

Rather than pretend profanity does not exist, for example, I would rather teach children how to respond to those who feel the need to use such language and to also educate children regarding the magical and important tool of word selection in expressing one's self--that no word should be used in a way which trivializes its meaning and that words that are spoken should accurately convey whatever emotions or thoughts the speaker is experiencing, but toward a goal of constructive resolution of the matter at hand.

In summary, the abuse of community is that general dynamic of negating rather than integrating and empowering individuality and collaboration. Positively and concisely stated, if we truly know who we are and if we then work together with mutual respect, the healing of humanity--individually and collectively--becomes a very real possibility.

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## Refusing Community

Central to all interrelational problems is some example of fracturing or separation. Like a pane of glass which has been inadvertently dropped and now lies in pieces on the sidewalk, some sort of repair (or re-assigning of the pieces to another task) must occur before the glass can serve any good use.

When an individual is hurt and pulls away, community is refused and fractured. Maintaining that separation more or less freezes some part of the growth of all individuals involved at that moment in time. Healing, therefore, involves a sort of mental and emotional journeying back through our lives to somehow reclaim those parts of ourselves that were left behind.

Parallel to this, however, are those times when refusing community is essential to integrity. In viewing the movie, "Star Trek: Insurrection," I was deeply moved by the captain's recognition and expression that the socio-political action which constitutes the primary crisis of the movie, was an attack on "the very soul" of the Federation. In choosing to refuse and separate from a specific example of community, he and those who joined him were ultimately able to return that community to a better path. Unfortunately, all such struggles are not so effective. Nevertheless, when a community makes wrong choices, it must be opposed in whatever ways are available and potentially effective.

As an individual, although I have struggled throughout my life with being an anomaly in nearly every context, situation, and circumstance, I must nevertheless always leave room for people and communities to do the right thing; to always recognize that it is just as easy for me, as for the community, to be wrong. If I do not leave an opportunity for others to do the right thing, nor allow myself the freedom to change my mind and adopt new patterns after deep prayerful and thoughtful consideration, negative perceptions may become negative patterns--which become more difficult to change in direct proportion to the amount of time which passes, much like allowing weeds to grow in a garden rather than pulling them out while they are still small.

The other area which needs to be considered, however, is that of what constitutes true community and whether what is being refused is in fact true community or more accurately an objectionable counterfeit.

Just as I use a mirror each morning to see whether or where the first stubble of a beard has begun to grow and must be shaved off in order for me to remain available to being Sister Who, I must also be able to look into a mirror of self-reflection on a regular basis to examine whether anything that is lacking integrity has quietly crept into my life. The same can be said of any genuine community. Just as a human body must be examined, perhaps daily, to be aware of needed maintenance which can be done, communities also need times of looking inward and honestly questioning whether interpersonal dynamics, spiritual integrity, and collaborative patterns are at their best or need to be improved in some way.

It is not hateful or negative to engage in such awareness. It is simply the first step of creating something even better than what now exists, much as a tree sends up new branches and new leaves during the spring and releases old growth during the autumn of each year.

The relationship between community and individuality is symbiotic: each depending upon the contributions of the other to sustain vibrant and empowering life. Either can engage in refusal for a variety of reasons, some of which are quite legitimate.

If you remember only one point from this particular article, however, I hope that it is that any occurrence of refusal is also a request for some sort of intervention or reconfiguration of relationship. All that being said, some requests remain (at least for now) denied. Like a seed within the ground, we can only hope that life will break through and begin anew at some point in the future.

The ability to reinvent and reconfigure one's self to respond to changing circumstances, challenges, and information is perhaps the greatest and most essential quality to the continuance of any form or aspect of life. Spiritually, socially, politically, psychologically, emotionally, and even religiously, every day is an opportunity to refuse that community which devalues life specifically in order to pursue a true community which values, supports, and empowers life instead. It may be that the insights and understanding necessary to such progress require times of solitude, but such perceptions are never complete until they have also been shared--by whatever means is available.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

## Using Community

Life would be so much easier if community did everything for us, if it really was quite legitimate to go to church for primarily for what one receives rather than a healthier combination of reasons. It is equally as damaging, however, for a community to assume the role of enabler in any individual's life as it is for any individual to assume that role. The fundamental quality of an enabler is the maintenance of whatever is necessary for a problem to remain a very real element within the ongoing unfolding of life.

A true community, however, is a most valuable resource by which such a negative pattern of relationship can be in some way avoided or remedied.

I have two eyes and two ears and for the most part this is true of the majority of other human individuals as well. My eyes are both on the front of my head, which dictates (with somewhat minor allowances for peripheral vision) that I will only directly see what is in front of me and never what is behind.

Similarly, I have two ears which are located on the sides of my head. When I am straining to hear a faint whisper, I frequently turn my head toward the sound and may even close my eyes, in order to catch every auditory vibration available.

My nose detects fragrances and smells of various kinds, but not when contrary air movement is present. My tongue registers various tastes, but only with things that directly contact it. My fingers register textures, vibrations, and weights, but again only with things that directly contact them. That's pretty much the limit of my physical perception.

***“Because--every so often--  
life knocks me on my butt  
and yells, 'Reality Check!'  
I strive to remain  
constructively honest  
with myself and with others  
so that I will not hit the ground  
quite so hard the next time.”***

***--Sister Who***

In community, I have available to me all of the physical senses and all of the minds of all of the members of the particular community--to the extent that I also have established effective communication with the other members of my community. Perception and potential understanding are exponentially increased because each of these persons is also perceiving, learning, and interpreting new things each and every day.

Among the essential dynamics of such positive relationship is that of acknowledging and responding positively to others' needs--all of their needs, to the best of the community's individual and collective abilities. Some experience a need to receive. What is often overlooked is that some experience a need to give, to make a contribution, and to participate in what is occurring within the community. The longer one is involved within a community, the more likely it is that one will eventually experience all of the roles--including that of being the one in need--which we all seem to be intent upon avoiding, but is actually an essential corollary to someone else's need to give. As much as we can learn by giving, we can also learn by receiving.

Similarly, humanity includes both the rich and the poor and their ideal relationship is an interactive and symbiotic one, specifically because the ideal goal of life is not to accumulate the most things or the nicest possessions, but to become the most wonderful person one can be. Money is a simply a tool and not an adequate reason for denying someone adequate housing, food, clothing, health care, or opportunity.

Community has the ability to successfully respond to each and every human need, specifically because it has more resources, strength, perception, and wisdom than any individual will ever be able to encompass.

The maintenance of that abundance of resources, strength, perception, and wisdom, however, is dependent upon the inclusion of thriving individuals.

Community depends upon each of us to both to thrive as individuals and to also hold it accountable to practices of regular re-evaluation and improvement. Because God is real and forever beckons to us from mystery to develop more understanding and capability, nothing is impossible. May love and peace thus prevail!

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

## Choosing Community

For the symbiotic relationship of community and individuality to occur at all, choice is essential. As much as the community must choose to value and include thriving individuals and must work to inspire and empower individuals who are not thriving to begin to do so, individuals must also choose to involve themselves in community in healthy ways.

Sometimes this means not taking on so many responsibilities and challenges that life becomes far too frantic and stressful to have any time or energy left for community involvement.

Sometimes this also means maintaining personal boundaries when a community erroneously asks one to do too much. A realistic appraisal of what one can do which avoids being over-extended prevents personal "burn out."

Life was never intended to be one continuous sprint from birth to early retirement to squeezing in every conceivable accomplishment before death calls a halt to everything. It may be that inordinate levels of stress, increased occurrence of violence, and unrealistic expectations are not requests for us to extend our capabilities but rather indications that some things have been allowed to go too far and that it's time for humanity to collectively slow down and remember to just breath.

Choosing community means going slow enough and flying low enough to be able to see the landscape, to recognize the faces of the people, and to begin to not only understand the joys and struggles of their individual experiences but also to involve one's self in intelligent ways within those joys and struggles.

Life is meant to be shared--its artistry, its depth as well as its length and breadth, and its spiritual mystery and reality. Community has the capacity to manifest that dream, but only if it and all of the individuals which comprise it find ways to encounter each moment of life with strength, with wisdom, and with love.

This, however, is perhaps the ultimate paradox. With the introduction of love comes the introduction of vulnerability--the recognition that such open and honest involvement will most likely change every participant, including ourselves. Love in combination with wisdom and strength, however, insures that this will be a good thing.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be!

## On a Personal Note

After more than a year of focused struggle and more than a decade of striving, the new introduction for "Sister Who Presents..." is finally complete and accurately introduces a show focused upon the basic questions of life (who, why, truth, perception, which, differences, possibilities, where, when, what next), thus allowing for the creation of new episodes of this ongoing series using available personal resources (my personal computer and video camera). The next step will be to begin creating the content of these new shows (which will be available on DVD for direct purchase by viewing audiences as well as being submitted to various television, cable, and satellite companies for wider distribution. Availability of these recordings will be announced initially within this ongoing newsletter and indefinitely within my website, [www.sisterwho.com](http://www.sisterwho.com).

Work continues on the 2007 Sister Who calendar, entitled "Sister Who and Sacred Spaces," in spite of technical difficulties. I hope to have this project completed by the end of November at the very latest.

I am continuing to work on creating a portable chapel-tent which will be used within creative festivals here in Colorado as well as other places (i.e. People's Fair, metaphysical festivals, and other events supportive of artistic or spiritual creativity) and have made some very good progress but now need to raise approximately \$1500 for the fabric shell, which will be imprinted to resemble a stone chapel with stained-glass windows. Your prayers or suggestions to help raise these funds are very much appreciated.

As to my final quarter of graduate school, it is proving to be every bit as much of a turbulent adventure as any quarter before it, but I think everything is going to turn out well--though as usual, not the way I expected. As some friends have often expressed, "Ultimately, it's all good."

May God's blessings, love, and peace be with you now and always, *Sister Who*

### Subscription Information:

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