

[Opinion](#)
[Spirituality](#)



(Unsplash/Andrew Shiau)



by Virginia Herbers

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

August 15, 2019

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

I remember a time when I was in junior high and my older sister interrupted my struggle with social studies homework to have me "come look at something really neat." What she proceeded to show me was, in my estimation, not neat at all but completely repulsive. A few days ago, I told a friend a story that I believed to be inspirational and galvanizing, only to receive from her a dull, polite response of, "That's really nice."

So how is it that two people who know each other well and have shared much in common can be looking at the same thing and have completely different experiences of it? How is it that what one person identifies as being absolutely stupendous, another can assess as unremarkable? I believe it's more complicated than differing perspectives or a different set of interests and preferences.

I have heard the same Scripture passage used to bolster opposite sides of an argument; I have experienced well-intentioned folks trying hard to understand an opposite point of view and ending up completely unable to do so.

For example, another of my older sisters and I once had occasion to take a long road trip together. We got to discussing the movie "[Doubt](#)." Interestingly enough, when we talked about the conclusion each of us had drawn at the end of the movie about the supposed guilt or innocence of the two main characters, we had opposite impressions.

So we talked about that. And we talked about how we had each formed the impressions we had. And then we listened to the other person's point of view, truly considering it and absorbing it into our own way of thinking, questioning and probing deeper into the mindsets of the other. And we decided that we would watch it again together, adopting the other person's way of thinking and seeing how that changed our own perceptions. So we did. At the end of the movie, I said to her, "So, what do you think now?" Her answer: "I still feel the same way I did before." My answer: "Me too."

Having good intentions to come to an agreement, having a desire to see things in the same way as someone else sees them, simply isn't enough. Why? I don't believe the approach to the "why" of this type of situation is helped by simple conclusions of closed-mindedness or differing points of view. I wonder if it has more to do with each of our own past experiences, our own integration of those experiences into our

current worldview, and our own honesty with ourselves about ourselves.

In Heidi Russell's [keynote address](#) at the [2018 LCWR assembly](#) in St. Louis (available [here](#)), she shared a story about how her worldview changed with regard to implicit racial bias. It was all about her experience — not just the experiences that happened to her, but experiences she and her husband deliberately chose. What I learned from her story is that if I have the courage to recognize and admit something in myself that is lacking and that I want to change, I have to deliberately choose the environments that will allow that change to occur. Desire and good intentions are not enough. I must make choices that will actually effect a change — in me.

I have been in Italy as the mass shootings in [El Paso](#), Texas, and [Dayton](#), Ohio, occurred. The people of Italy, like us here in the U.S., are struggling with the question of national borders and refugees. Admittedly, these types of issues are extremely charged no matter where we live, usually laden with emotion and politics. They are laden with something else, though.

Behind the politics and beyond the emotion lies the truth that these, and a whole slew of other contemporary social issues, are fundamentally about human rights. They have to do with a parent's right to send his child to kindergarten and a teenager's right to attend a concert at a public venue without fearing that something horrible may happen. They have to do with recognizing in any suffering member of humanity a suffering member of the body of Christ, to which we all belong and for which we all bear responsibility, regardless of nationality.

Advertisement

Desire for positive change and good intentions about praying for victims and advocating for justice are well and good — and as we well know, they are insufficient. We must make choices that actually effect change — not just in policy and voting but in lifestyle.

Each of us, starting with me, must take a long look at her own life to see where I welcome and where I exclude, where I make peace and where I allow for violence. This is not in the least bit theoretical; this ought be part of our daily bread, and if it doesn't make me squirm, then as my mother used to tell me, "You're not doing it

right."

Ignatian spirituality encourages a daily examen wherein I examine the ways in which I noticed God's presence and movements in my day and the ways in which I might have missed it. This personal examen tends to have two effects on me. First, in the positive aspects of recognizing God's grace, it makes me grateful, which is a wonderful way to be open to possibilities for growth. Secondly, in the aspects in which I find myself lacking, it makes me uncomfortable — and that's the starting point of conversion.

Personal conversion will likely not yield to a world in which we all agree, but I believe it could pave the way for a world in which disagreements no longer lead to hate. For this I pray — and for this may we all promise to work.

[Virginia Herbers is an Apostle of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Her ministries have included education at the elementary and high school levels, spiritual direction on university campuses, directing the Queen of Apostles Spiritual Life Center in St. Louis, and a variety of ministries for her community, including formation, vocation and provincial leadership. She is currently living in St. Louis awaiting a new ministry position.]

Editor's note: We can send you a newsletter every time a [Young Voices](#) column is posted to [NCRonline.org](#). Go to this page and follow directions: [Newsletter sign-up](#).