

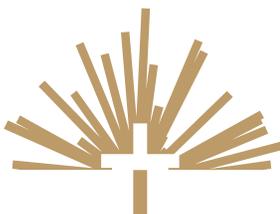


FAITH FEEDS

Having a faith conversation with old and new friends is as easy as setting the table.

**FAITH FEEDS GUIDE
SPRING 2019**

C21



THE CHURCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY CENTER

**BOSTON
COLLEGE**

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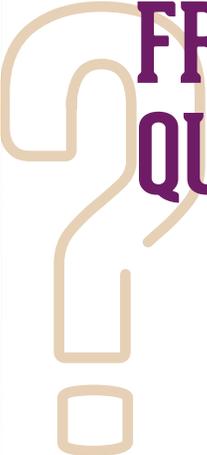
The C21 Center Presents

FAITH FEEDS

The **FAITH FEEDS** program is designed for individuals in Catholic parishes who are hungry for opportunities to talk about their faith with others who share it. Participants gather over coffee or a potluck lunch or dinner, and a host parishioner facilitates conversation using the C21 Center's bi-annual magazine, *C21 Resources*.

The **FAITH FEEDS GUIDE** offers easy, step-by-step instructions for planning, as well as materials to guide the conversation. It's as simple as a parishioner deciding to host the gathering at the church hall and spreading the word.

The first **FAITH FEEDS** themed conversation for the Spring season will be on the gift of friendship. All selected articles have been taken from the Spring 2018 issue of *C21 Resources*.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who should host a FAITH FEEDS?

Anyone who has a heart for facilitating faith conversations among new friends. It doesn't take more than that.

Who should I contact if I want to host a FAITH FEEDS?

You should contact your pastor or appropriate parish representative.

What do I do if more than 10 people sign up?

We recommend creating a waiting list in the event any participants need to cancel. If enough people sign up for a second or third group, other parishioners can choose to serve as a host for a concurrent FAITH FEEDS.

Do participants have to read the articles in advance?

We recommend that guests read the articles in order to get the most out of the conversation, but if they don't have time, the host's summary and questions will be sufficient to help participants join in.

What is the host's commitment?

The host is responsible for coordinating culinary contributions, getting guests their materials, and facilitating conversation during the **FAITH FEEDS**.

What is the guest's commitment?

Guests are asked to contribute something for the meal and, if time permits, to read the articles that will be discussed.

Does a priest or parish representative need to attend?

It is not necessary for a priest or parish representative to attend, but they are certainly welcome to join as guests or to serve as a host.

READY TO GET STARTED?



STEP ONE

Decide to host a **FAITH FEEDS**. Contact your pastor or parish representative to confirm a date and time to use the church hall. An hour and a half to two hours is enough time to allocate for the gathering.



STEP TWO

Spread the news to your fellow parishioners by coordinating with your parish representative. You might post a notice in the parish bulletin, make an announcement after Mass or promote on parish social media accounts. This small faith conversation gathering works best with 8 to 10 participants, so it shouldn't take long to fill out your guest list. Each **FAITH FEEDS** group will only meet once.



STEP THREE

Interested participants are asked to RSVP directly to you, the host. Once you have your list of attendees, confirm with everyone via email. That would be the appropriate time to ask guests to commit to bringing a potluck dish or drink to the gathering.



STEP FOUR

Review the selected articles from the *C21 Resources* magazine and questions that will serve as a starter for your **FAITH FEEDS** discussion. Hosts should encourage guests to download the Guest Packet on FAITHFEEDS.org. Then, hosts should request free copies of the full magazine from the C21 Center to distribute at the gathering. Contact information can be found on page 15.



STEP FIVE

Send out a confirmation email a week before the **FAITH FEEDS** gathering. Hosts should arrive early for set up. Begin with the Gathering Prayer found on page 15. Hosts can begin the discussion by presenting the summary and using the suggested questions. The conversation should grow organically from there. Enjoy this gathering of new friends, knowing the Lord is with YOU!



CONVERSATION STARTERS

*“It can be hard to find God, and even harder to find yourself, but if you find a friend, you find all three.”
—Anonymous*

Here are three articles to guide your **FAITH FEEDS** conversation. We suggest that you select two that will work best for your group, and if time permits, add in a third. In addition to the original article, you will find a relevant quotation, summary, and suggested questions for discussion. We offer these as tools for your use, but feel free to go where the Holy Spirit leads.

The Spring 2019 Theme is: **The Gift of Friendship**

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

IN THE FIRST LETTER OF ST. JOHN, we read this extraordinary three-word description of God: It boldly states, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). This is the cumulative punchline to God’s self-disclosure over the previous 2,000 years, first to the Israelites and then in God’s own Son, Jesus, the Christ. The Hebrew Scriptures reveal many attributes of God—of mercy, justice, loving kindness, compassion, graciousness, and so on. Now, encouraged by the teachings of Jesus, John summarizes “God is love.” And to say God is love is to say that God is in love—with us.

Note well the Greek term here is *agape*. So God is love toward us with the fullest form of altruistic love. God does not love us because we earn or deserve it, but out of infinite generosity. And God continues to love us unconditionally—even if we don’t return God’s love. There is literally nothing we can do to stop God from loving us.

From ancient times, philosophers have also recognized this kind of *agapaic* love as the highest form of friendship. It is not based on utility, nor on familial relationships, nor on *eros*. It is love, pure and simple, given without deserving or even expecting return. That God is infinite *agape* toward us means God is our best friend.

The first part of 1 John 4:8 is the clue to how we are to respond and live into our friendship with God. The full verse reads, “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” In other words, our friendships are precisely how we can come to “know” this God who is love. This could not be otherwise. Created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27), we are made to love and be loved. To live without love/friendship negates who we are and blocks us from experiencing God’s love/friendship. As John says a few verses later, “Those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen” (1 John 4:20).

Might our divine friendship prompt us to share our friends with God and God with our friends? We can surely raise up our friends before God, praying for them, asking God to bless them, that we be good friends together. And, as appropriate, why not share our divine friendship with our friends? To witness that God is our best friend can inspire human friends to consider or deepen their own divine friendship.

Thomas Groome
Professor, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry



Lazarus as Friend



JEAN VANIER

IN LUKE'S GOSPEL, Jesus tells a moving story. There was a beggar named Lazarus who lived in the streets. He was hungry and his legs were covered with sores. Living opposite him, in a beautiful house, was a rich man who used to give big parties for his friends. Lazarus would have liked to have eaten some of the crumbs that fell from his table, but the dogs ate them up. One day, Lazarus died and went to the place of peace, in the "heart of Abraham." The rich man also died and he went to the "place of torment." Looking up, he saw Lazarus radiant with peace and he cried out: "Father Abraham, please send Lazarus down to put some water on my lips for I am in pain!" Abraham responded: "It is impossible. Between you and him there is an abyss that nobody can cross." He could have added: "Just as there had been an abyss between you and him during your life on earth."



THIS STORY OF Lazarus tells us a lot about today's world, where there is a huge abyss between those who have food, money, and comfort and those who are hungry or have no place of their own. I remember seeing children in Calcutta, their noses glued to the window of a luxurious restaurant. From time to time, the doorman would shoo them away. The rich—and that includes me and many of you who are reading this—do not like to see dirty beggars staring at them. Haven't we all felt embarrassment and fear in front of those who are hungry?

What is this abyss that separates people? Why are we unable to look Lazarus straight in the eye and listen to him?

I suspect we exclude Lazarus because we are frightened that our hearts will be touched if we enter into a relationship with him. If we listen to his story and hear his cry of pain we will discover he is a human being. We might be touched by his broken heart and by his misfortunes. What happens when our hearts are touched? We might want to do something to comfort and help him, to alleviate his pain, and where will that lead us? As we enter into dialogue with a beggar, we risk entering into an adventure. Because Lazarus needs not only money but also a place to stay, medical treatment, maybe work, and, even more, he needs friendship.

This is why it is dangerous to enter into a relationship with the Lazaruses of our world. If we do, we risk our lives being changed.

All of us are, more or less, locked up in our cultures, in our habits, even in our friendships and places of belonging. If I become the friend of a beggar, I rock the boat. Friends may

feel uncomfortable, even threatened, by my new ways; perhaps they feel challenged to do likewise. They may become aggressive, they may criticize the foolish, so-called utopian ways of the one in their midst who befriends a beggar.

I am beginning to discover how fear is a terrible motivating force in all our lives. We are frightened of failure and of rejection. And I have become increasingly aware not only of my own fears but of the fears of others. Fear is at the root of all forms of exclusion, just as trust is at the root of all forms of inclusion.

This fear of the different is very marked when it comes to people with intellectual disabilities. I remember when I first met Fr. Thomas Phillippe, the French priest who became my spiritual accompanier when I left the navy and who was instrumental in the founding of L'Arche. He invited me to meet his "new friends" in a small institution where he was the chaplain. At the time, I was teaching philosophy at St. Michael's College in Toronto. I accepted his invitation but, nevertheless, I was very anxious. How was I going to communicate with people who could not talk? If they could talk, what could we talk about? I was fearful of not being able to cope with the situation or of not knowing what to do and of being inadequate.

People with intellectual disabilities are generally placed at the lowest end of the human spectrum. When I first encountered them at L'Arche, I believed in love but, for me, love meant generosity, doing good for others. At that time, I did not realize that through our love we can help others to discover their own intrinsic value; we can reveal to them their beauty and their uniqueness.

Gradually, through L'Arche, I began to see the value of the communion of

hearts and of a love that empowers, that helps others to stand up; a love that shows itself in humility and in trust. If our society has difficulty in functioning, if we are continually confronted by a world in crisis, full of violence, of fear, of abuse, I suggest it is because we are not clear about what it means to be human. We tend to reduce being human to acquiring knowledge, power, and social status. We have disregarded the heart, seeing it only as a symbol of weakness, the center of sentimentality and emotion, instead of as a powerhouse of love that can reorient us from our self-centeredness, revealing to us and to others the basic beauty of humanity, empowering us to grow.

The excluded, I believe, live certain values that we all need to discover and to live ourselves before we can become truly human. It is not just a question of performing good deeds for those who are excluded but of being open and vulnerable to them in order to receive the life that they can offer; it is to become their friends. If we start to include the disadvantaged in our lives and enter into heartfelt relationships with them, they will change things in us. They will call us to be people of mutual trust, to take time to listen and be with each other. They will call us out from our individualism and need for power into belonging to each other and being open to others. They will break down the prejudices and protective walls that gave rise to exclusion in the first place. They will then start to affect our human organizations, revealing new ways of being and walking together. ■

JEAN VANIER is a philosopher, theologian, and humanitarian, and the founder of the international movement of L'Arche communities.

John Vanier, *Becoming Human* (Paulist Press, 1998), 69-71, 76-78, 84, excerpts reprinted with permission of Paulist Press.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 12: Courtesy of L'Arche Boston.

LAZARUS AS FRIEND

“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” –1 John 4:20

Summary

In this excerpt from his book *Becoming Human*, Jean Vanier reflects on how Christians are called to friendship with “the least of these,” those who are vulnerable, outcast, or on the margins. Vanier couches that command in light of the story that Jesus tells in the Gospel of Luke about Lazarus and the rich man. As someone who has spent his life caring for persons with intellectual disabilities – those he says are “placed at the lowest end of the human spectrum” – Vanier challenges readers to consider not only who they are called to befriend but also the way in which they demonstrate that friendship through a personal and intimate encounter. This piece is about becoming friends with “the other” out of love for Jesus.

Questions for Conversation

- Vanier says that “fear is the form of all exclusion” and “trust is the root of all forms of inclusion.” Have you ever been afraid or embarrassed to extend friendship to someone? What did you do to overcome it?
 - Do you think Vanier is right that people’s deepest longing is for friendship?
 - Do you have opportunities to encounter the poor or the vulnerable in your daily life? If not, where you might you seek them out?
 - Are there people closer to home who might need you to reach out in friendship?
 - In our polarized times, it can be hard to extend friendship to people with different political, religious, or cultural values than those we espouse. How might we overcome these differences and forge friendships with them? It is possible to be friends with “the other” in our world today?
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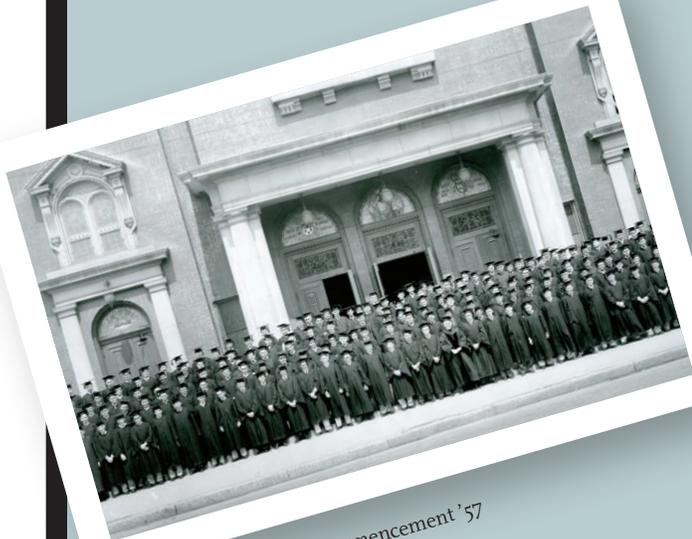
DEEP AND ABIDING FRIENDSHIP LASTS FOREVER

ROBERT NEWTON

LAST MONTH, three members of my University of Scranton 1957 graduating class died, two of whom I knew well and regarded as good friends. We had gone our separate ways after graduation but the memories of our interactions and my admiration for them had not dimmed over the succeeding decades, even with only occasional sightings and reports. Their obituaries bore out their exceptional lives of accomplishment and generosity.

Earlier this year, I decided, after several years of silence except for Christmas greetings, to reconnect with Patrick O'Brien, a dear friend of 60-plus years. I wrote him a long letter over a weekend and mailed it Monday morning. On Wednesday, I received a call from his wife saying she had received the letter that day, and my friend had died on the previous Sunday after 10 days in the hospital suffering from pneumonia. I wrote her a long letter describing key moments in our friendship over his lifetime, reflecting on how much that friendship had colored and in some instances changed my life.

I came to Boston College 38 years ago, where I met Bill Neenan, S.J. We worked together for 11 years in academic administration and established a deep respect and friendship. When he retired as academic vice president, he presided in a house across from my office. Twice a week, sometimes more, I would visit him and was always greeted with: "Come on in; have you heard the latest? or have I got a story to tell you!" He died suddenly a few years ago after a rich and fulfilling life, a life dedicated to finding God in everyone he encountered.



University of Scranton Commencement '57

When I reflect on these old friends, I can say both that I miss them, but also that I do not miss them—because I continue to experience their presence in my life: their goodness, their humanity, their humor, their faith, the joy and fulfillment that was mine through knowing them. I imagine that others reading this reflection who are in later life have the same experience.

The Mass of Christian burial reminds us: “Indeed for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven.” It remains my conviction that in death, friendship is changed not ended, and that when a good friend departs, he or she remains vibrant in the lives they touched in their earthly pilgrimage, continuing to enlighten and enrich those who live on. A true friendship transcends the grave, bridging the boundary between life and death. ■

ROBERT NEWTON is the special assistant to the president at Boston College. He previously served as the associate academic vice president.

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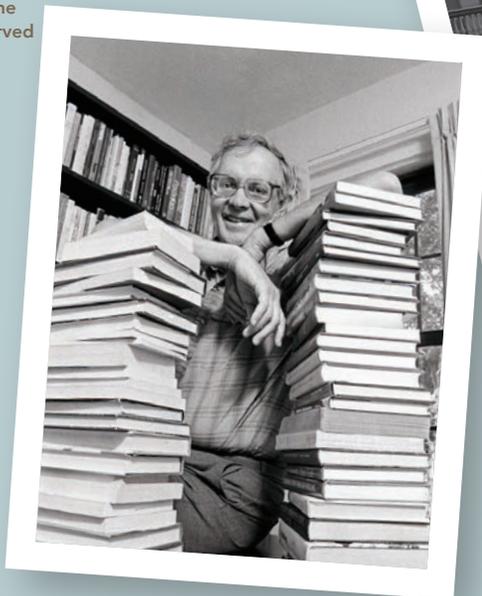
PHOTO CREDITS: Page 14: Thank you to the Special Collections staff at the Weinberg Memorial Library, University of Scranton, for use of the 1957 Commencement photo.



Robert Newton (center) with University of Scranton classmates, celebrating 50th reunion



Patrick O'Brien



William B. Neenan, S.J.

GATHERING PRAYER

Be With Us Today

St Thomas More (1478-1535)

Father in heaven,
you have given us a mind to know you,
a will to serve you,
and a heart to love you.

Be with us today in all that we do,
so that your light may shine out in our lives.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Summer 2019 **FAITH FEEDS**
conversation theme will be: **Faith and Family**

Visit **FAITHFEEDS.org** for more information.

This program is sponsored by Boston College's Church in the 21st Century Center, a catalyst and a resource for the renewal of the Catholic Church.

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