

Ten “Killers” of Genuine, Mature Community

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Jean Vanier, founder of the famous L’Arche community for disabled men and women, writes: “This people have been called together to be a sign and a witness, to accomplish a particular mission, which is their charism, their gift.”

In the same way, each local church community has been called by God to *be* something lovely together and to *do* something in our world. This togetherness, however, requires integrity from each of us, an honesty rarely found in most church relationships today.

This involves honestly confronting and freeing ourselves from myths that keep us divided from both ourselves and one another.

Consider these top blockages. Geri and I have been pondering this list for quite some time.

1. We lie

It has been said that 9 of 10 Americans lie regularly – to themselves, to their friends, employers, parents, children, to themselves. We avoid people rather than be honest. We make excuses that really aren’t truth. Jesus affirms that the truth alone sets us free (Jn. 8:32).

2. We look to other people to tell us we are okay

This lying is often rooted in our need for others to affirm or validate us so we feel good about ourselves. We are not sure who we are and have not taken the needed time to grow up into adults! Jesus was able to disappoint people out of a solid sense of who He was before His Father.

3. We think loving people means keeping them happy.

We think hurt and love can’t be in same community instead of embracing, like Jesus, that hurt is often part of helping others mature

4. We encourage false peace

Unlike Jesus, we often appease, give in or avoid people because we hate confrontation. We are afraid to speak the truth. We say “yes” and mean “no”. In doing so, we cancel ourselves out and the integrity of our community.

5. We are confused about anger

We think all anger is sin rather than an oil light in our interiors that something is wrong! Rather than see anger as a gift to assert ourselves in a

mature way like Jesus, we often blame, stuff, become resentful, avoid or explode unto others.

6. We love our neighbors and not ourselves

I meet many people in church who hate themselves. We know God loves us intellectually but carry self-hate deep within us. And we wonder why we have difficulty loving others well.

7. We over-function.

We do for others what they can and should do for themselves. We mistakenly call that love. Jesus gave his disciples appropriate responsibilities at the right time and had them stand on their own two feet.

8. We are quick to speak and slow to listen.

We think we are supposed to have answers and become anxious when there is silence. We feel we have to fix and save one another. Jesus knew there was a time to speak and a time to be silent.

9. We think “love believes all things” means we should believe all things

There is a tendency to avoid the data and facts when they are uncomfortable. We don't want to be negative or critical. So we, at times, don't ask difficult questions or say anything when something is clearly wrong.

10. We think differences mean division.

We are often suspicious of people who do life and their walk with Christ differently than us. Yet our differences in personality, backgrounds, cultures, preferences, and gifts bring spice and beauty to our togetherness.

I believe God has called us as the church to be a sign and a witness, to accomplish a particular mission as Jean Vanier notes.

This means we will need to wrestle individually with what it means to live a life “divided no more” *within* ourselves, challenging the way our cultures, our family of origin and our formerly “nice” church environments (if we had one) may have given us a “killer” virus to emotionally healthy relationships.

For as my lovely wife has rightly said, “How can I be one with you when I am divided within myself?”