

Writings on the Review of Life by Joe Conrad of the Cleveland Community of Little Brothers and Sisters of the Eucharist

I would like to say a few things about review of life. We have come to learn that this experience is different between the different communities. Each member of a small group of 6 to eight members reviews their life every month. There is something deep within me that is deeply attracted to the Eucharist, Jesus, and the gospel.

For me the process of review each month has been my compass. I discover where I have lost my bearings and can chart new directions. The review of life is sharing my journey toward Jesus. Two of the most critical elements of the review process are honesty and trust. I must be truly honest with myself recognizing both the good and bad that exist in me. Each of us has parts of our lives that are hidden even from ourselves. When review is done in an atmosphere of prayer and reflection we discover those things that are hidden. As those things are brought to light the review challenges us to trust and share them with our small group. Honesty invites conversion and change. Openness and trust are the foundation of community.

The power of the review comes not in the ways that we help or support each other but rather from the way we witness in our review to each other and the ways in which we are present to others (the way we listen to others) as they review their life. The review is not a time for giving advice or patting each other on the back. It is a time for listening—listening for the voice of God in another. That simple act of quieting ourselves, being present to others and listening becomes a very very quiet yet very powerful form of affirmation a quiet affirmation that resonates within.

There are many pitfalls in the review (I have probably found them all, maybe even invented a few of my own). In my review I can get caught up in reporting all of the activities of my life and avoid telling about where I am with God. Another trap one can fall in to is to constantly focus our review on problems. We live simple ordinary lives that certainly have struggles and times of grief but our lives also have just as many moments of joy. To constantly focus our review on the negative distorts the integrity of the review of life. I often get up in the intellectual gospel of my life. The intellectual world is often a safer place to live and share. It only asks me to answer hypothetically. The world of the heart, the world of the Spirit asks me to decide and act in this very moment.

All of these are ways of avoiding a true review of life—ways of avoiding God. And we all get caught in them from time to time. Members new to the review should not get discouraged. If the review of life is done faithfully in a spirit of prayer we will discover our short comings and we can correct them and move on. It takes time to build trust in your small group but when that happens you might seek one member to critique your review from time to time.

I have been a member of the Cleveland community for 20 years. I have a job that demands too much of me, a marriage vow that I am committed to, and four children. I have committed my life

to be a Eucharistic presence to my wife, my children, the people I work with, and anyone else I meet along the way. Each month in prayer I prepare a review of how my month went including successes and failures. This simple act of review somehow revitalizes me. The times when things maybe went poorly there is a self forgiveness and a challenge to begin again. When things went well there is affirmation and strength to keep going. Often times in the business world it can seem like you are all alone in trying to be a presence of Jesus. Listening to the others share each month—seeing others trying to "Cry the Gospel with their life" I get a deep sense of belonging—a real sense that I am not alone. Review of life was not new to me. I had done some spiritual writing before I came to community but I was never very consistent with it. Community and commitment provide special discipline and structure. There is nothing that I do in community that I could not do alone. Community makes it easier.