

He's My Brother August 1, 2002

Where are we now in August 2002? Have we forgotten that moment of agony on September 11th? Have we lost the empathy we felt then for all those families, that empathy that reached out to the weeping families in Israel and Palestine, in every event of familial pain around the world?

Have we learned how to suffer with another? Have we learned how difficult the learning experience is for another?

Remember the film where the orphan child said to the priest: "He's not heavy, Father. He's my brother."

Dialogue education demands such empathy. Recently an adult student decided to leave a dialogue education training course offered in a southern city. I celebrate his decision, as did the course leader. It is imperative that we "put our money where our mouth is" and celebrate the decisions to both praise this approach to adult learning, and to reject it.

"He's not heavy, Father, he's my brother!"

That says it all. Who is not our brother? Who is not our sister? The heart of dialogue education is *respect* for the person, not for his opinions, his political perspective, his ethnicity.

I was reminded recently of a wonderful teaching of Martin Luther King. I cannot recall what he called it, but he taught that it was important to speak of every other person without reference to ethnicity: not Jane Vella, the Italian-Irish woman; not the Delaney Sisters, the black professional women, not Peter, the gay man... but just Jane Vella, the Delaney Sisters, Peter...

What a great lesson that has been for me. I have been cautious ever since hearing Dr. King teach this, never to refer to ethnicity or special quality of any person in my description of another.

Try it... see what happens! I trust you will discover: "He's not heavy, Father, he's my brother!"