Opinion



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I'm just back from a mini-conference with seven other sisters and six millennials to tell our life stories. (Millennials range from being born just before the year 2000 to turning 18 that year. More about who they are can be found here.) We were almost all from St. Louis, and we have plans to gather together again — not because we have any sort of agenda, but because, as it turned out, we shared intimately with one another and we don't want to lose track of each other.

Wayne Muller is a chaplain who has great admiration for nuns. This past year he's organized several meetings like ours around the country. His idea is simple: bring nuns and millennials together to tell each other who they are. He's titled it "Nuns and Nones," referencing their selection of "none" when questionnaires ask for religious affiliation.

But none of our millennials were unaffiliated with organized religion. Like the nuns, they had a big vision of the people of God, the call to serve, the need for regular spiritual practice, the call to hope when despair seems more appropriate. Two other millennials, Casper ter Kuile and Angie Thurston, have written about this in LCWR's "Occasional Papers" Summer 2017 issue: "The Hunger for Depth and Meaning Among Millennials."

Wayne's partner, Adam Horowitz, may be a millennial himself, at least in spirit. He was reticent about his background but passionate about the expression of culture in groups like ours. Indeed, he works for the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, which I never knew existed. I'll write more about his work next week.

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Each one of us had a different story to tell about our lives. Wayne asked us to start by telling about some question that was occupying us, that we were chewing on in quiet moments. Our questions were shaped in very different circumstances. But, of course, in sharing our particulars come to universal concerns: anger, sexual identity, passion for the work, fear of being alone, anxiety, hope, search for community.

My take-away is the simple reminder to myself how important it is to ask each other to tell our stories and give one another enough time to tell them. You can do it, too, in your own kitchen, with family, neighbors, members of your parish, ideally a small mix of younger and older people. Set the scene by inviting a little deeper reflection,

and use Wayne's starter question: "Is there some idea you have been chewing on while you're driving or working in the garden?" Tell us.