

25 Seasons of “Listening to Other Voices” at Glastonbury Abbey

September 16, 1999. Why would 75 people show up in a hurricane to hear a talk on “Spirituality on the Eve of the New Millennium”?

25 years ago, “Listening to Other Voices” was born when a dedicated group of volunteers at Glastonbury Abbey conceived of a free lecture series where people of all faiths would be welcome to come and learn about each other.

“I remember our first meeting where the idea of including people from various religious traditions was created – and the ‘Listening to Other Voices’ lecture series was born,” says one of the founders, Denise DiCenso. “We were so enthused and excited! What resonated with me was the commitment of our committee and the challenging and respectful conversations that transpired each month.”

Avis Goldstein, another founder, recalls: “As a member of the Jewish community, I thought, ‘how wonderful to now have a forum for people to learn about other faith traditions!’ Also, at the time, not many Catholic orders were open to listening and learning about other faith traditions. I was thrilled to be a part of this ‘movement’.”

Indeed, that a small community of Benedictine monks in Hingham was deeply interested in interreligious dialogue was remarkable. This open-mindedness was why so many well-known speakers -- Sister Helen Prejean, Liz Walker, Rabbi Arthur Green, Congressman Barney Frank, Fr. Greg Boyle, Swami Tyagananda, Rabbi Peter Rubinstein, Bernard Glassman, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, James Carroll, Fr. James Martin -- agreed to be a part of this program over the past 25 years.

The inaugural lecture of the “Listening to Other Voices” series was Sept. 16, 1999. 75 people braved a raging hurricane to hear Professor Ewert Cousins, world-renown theologian, discuss “Global Spirituality on the Eve of a New Millennium.” Professor Cousins spoke of his work on the Rosebud Reservation where he was drawn to the vibrancy and depth of Native American spirituality. This experience ignited a yearning in him to explore the religious experiences of diverse cultural traditions.

This yearning seeped into the souls of those in attendance that evening. According to Father Timothy Joyce of Glastonbury Abbey, the audience at that very first lecture was profoundly moved by Professor Cousins’ message to listen with your heart and learn from the religions of others – and integrate what you learn and appreciate into your own faith and understanding.

Father Albrecht of Glastonbury was then a physics professor at Eastern Nazarene College. He says: “I was one of those brave 75 people to attend that first lecture in 1999. In some ways, I

have traveled far since that time: I live as a monk here now! Ewert was a pioneer in inter-religious dialogue and set the tone for the character of the 'Listening to Other Voices' series."

The theme of this year's "Listening to Other Voices" series is "What Does it Mean to be Fully Human? A Faith Perspective." Six speakers of various faiths will address how their own tradition looks at our human story:

October 19, 2023 -- *Acknowledging Relationship: A Recall of the Conscious Heart*
with **Tiokasin Ghosthorse**, a member of the Cheyenne River Lakota Nation of South Dakota. His long history with Indigenous activism will inform his talk on how the Lakota people suffer from an identity crisis derived from a disconnection from the wise elder: Mother Earth.

November 16, 2023 – *Seek Knowledge, Even to the Ends of the Earth!*
with **Shabana Basij-Rasikh**, the president and co-founder of SOLA, the first boarding school for girls in Afghanistan. In 2021, as the Taliban swept into Kabul, Shabana led her school community into exile, re-establishing operations in Rwanda where classes continue to this day. She will discuss SOLA's founding, its future, and her lifelong commitment, in the spirit of her faith, to educating Afghan girls. **This is a virtual presentation.**

January 18, 2024 – *The Light We Give: Sikh Wisdom on Seeing Our Shared Humanity*
with **Simran Jeet Singh Ph.D.**, the Executive Director of the Religion & Society Program at the Aspen Institute and the author of the national bestseller "*The Light We Give: How Sikh Wisdom Can Transform Your Life.*"

February 15, 2024 – *A Faith Perspective from Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry*
with **Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim**, directors of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. They were students of Thomas Berry, and following Berry's footsteps were, until 2020, President and Vice President respectively of the American Teilhard Association.

March 21, 2024 – *Building a Vessel of Compassion*
with **Rabbi Karyn Kedar**, retired senior rabbi at Congregation BJBE in the Chicago area. Rabbi Kedar teaches courses and leads retreats that explore the need for meaning and purpose in our busy lives, creating an intentional life, spiritual awakening, forgiveness, as well as inspirational leadership and creating the synagogue for the twenty-first century.

April 18, 2024 – *What Does It Mean to Be Human?*
with **Narayan Helen Liebenson**, guiding teacher of the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center, an urban dharma center located in Cambridge, MA, where she has been teaching since 1985.

All are welcome to attend these free lectures at Glastonbury Abbey in the Morcone Conference Center at 7 PM. The lectures will also be available via Zoom. To register, go to our

website: www.glastonburyabbey.org and click on "Programs." Lectures are first come, first seated. After each talk, there is a discussion period followed by refreshments.

"That the LOV series is still thriving after 25 years is a noteworthy achievement -- a testament that people desire to understand and accept each other, despite our differences, especially during turbulent times," says Father Timothy.

For 69 years, the Benedictine Monks of Glastonbury Abbey have been providing peace, prayer and spiritual education to people of all faiths. The Listening to Other Voices Lecture Series, now celebrating its 25th year, is part of their ongoing commitment to interfaith dialogue with the goal of promoting peace and understanding.