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An opportunity to look beyond our pet peeves

Isabella R. Moyer | Nov. 21, 2012 NCR Today

I am neither a statistician nor a sociologist, but a simple glance at discussion board responses shows which topics draw in the liveliest conversations on the *NCR* website. John Allen gently alluded to this issue in his recent All Things Catholic column [1] on the situation in Syria:

> American Catholics currently wrapped up in whatever their pet peeve may be -- Cardinal Timothy Dolan's willingness to sit down with Obama at the Al Smith Dinner, for instance, or the new Mass translations, or the LCWR crackdown, or whatever -- may want to ponder that for a minute. However pressing those matters may be, they seem to pale in comparison, and perhaps we should spare a moment's thought for Syria.

I, too, have my pet peeves, and certain headlines guarantee that I will not only read the article, but will come back later to check out the ensuing conversations. *NCR* provides a wonderful service in allowing this kind of free and open conversation. But perhaps we need to ponder why international issues do not provoke the same kind of energetic discussion -- unless, of course, the topic is somehow related to one of our pet peeves.

In Allen's article, he quotes from a missionary sister's letter home to her family in Italy.

> The other day people asked if it made any sense for me to continue this mission, given the situation. Afterwards I put the same question to God in my prayers, and He didn't make me wait long for an answer. Unexpectedly, a lady showed up crying, very worried, asking only to be listened to. Speaking the Arabic dialect of our neighborhood, she only wanted a little advice, a word of consolation, to feel her hand held for a while.

No, we cannot heal all the hurts or solve all the problems of the world. Sometimes all that we can offer is a listening ear, a listening heart and a desire to better understand the experience and reality lived by our sisters and brothers. Columnists like John Allen and N.J. Viehland in the Philippines provide us with a graced window into the world and into the global church, an opportunity to look beyond our own parochialism and pet peeves.

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[1] http://ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/elderly-churchs-swing-state-and-sparing-thought-syria