

SOMEBODY WHO'S ALL EARS

Ask anyone who knows her and they'll tell you that my mother is a lover of bunnies. There was even an article in the newspaper once about her stuffed bunny collection. Despite giving most of them to family as gifts last Christmas, her room at the nursing home is once again populated with a wide variety of stuffed rabbits. Knowing her fondness for bunnies my son-in-law's mother gave her a bunny wall hanging for mother's day. Underneath a rabbit with big floppy ears is the saying, "Everyone needs somebody who is all ears."

Mom likes it so much that she made it into a Christmas card to share with friends to let them know how she values their being with and listening to her. She's pretty good at doing that herself. She tells me how she encourages new aides, affirming their care and asking them about themselves. No wonder she's a favorite of the staff.

We all know that there is nothing better than having someone who listens, truly listens to us. It makes us feel safe, loved, at home. It's great to receive, but so very hard to do.

In this Christmas season when we are often rushed, overwhelmed, and admit it, sometimes anxious about all the family events we'll be attending, wouldn't it be a blessing if we could find a way to make these occasions truly memorable?

How about working on bringing the gift of listening to the party? I'm talking about "all ears" listening, that kind that leaves one feeling restored and renewed.

To really do this means putting our own agendas aside. There's no planning a response while the other is speaking. It's taking the time to be with, to give ourselves to the other, and to actually hear what is being said. It's hard work

to do, but a healing balm to receive. In a true sense it is life-giving.

And how fitting at this time of year when we celebrate God's love gift of becoming flesh and dwelling among us that we share this gift by opening our hearts and our spirits in presence to others.



Anyone who has ever had or cared for an infant knows about being tuned in to another. Imagine Mary cradling baby Jesus, alert for signs of hunger or discomfort. There's nothing more important than being present to him. He's the focus of all of her attention. Despite the sleep deprivation and getting the hang of motherhood, his sweet baby breath as he slumbers, and his contented sighs after he's fed makes all the sacrifice worthwhile.

As Mary was called to enflesh God's love in Jesus we also are called to share that love with others—to dwell with or as some scholars translate "pitch our tent" with those in our lives. This means staying connected to and really being with them. Unfortunately our culture tends to define this in terms of cell phones and tablets. As Christians we are called to be countercultural, to shut off our electronic devices and "be with" others. It's not an easy thing to do, but like time with an infant, its rewards are priceless.

As it often happens, Mom is right. We do need to have and to be friends who are all ears—what a wonderful gift for Christmas or any time!

—Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate