

## THE OVERLOOKED PIECE

### *A fresh look at literacy*

by Mary Sharon Moore

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Literacy—the ability to read and comprehend—is absolutely necessary to navigate through life. Literacy as a “meaning making” skill is one important way we assign value to things and make sense of our lives, our circumstances, and our world.

But “reading and comprehending” is not confined to ink on newsprint or words on the computer screen. We seek meaning in our lives because the human spirit is irresistibly engaged in the mystery of life.

Within our Catholic heritage, what are some forms of literacy that engage us in God’s life by shaping and illuminating what is truly human in our own?

First is religious literacy: the ability to read and comprehend God’s creative and redemptive work in the world today, especially in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Religious literacy frees one to participate in God’s work of compassion, healing, and justice.

Second is moral literacy: the ability to read and comprehend the quality of human

relationships in light of the source and destiny of all relationships, the Holy Trinity.

Third is emotional literacy: the ability to read and comprehend the emotional situations of another person in ways that enable one to express compassion, offer encouragement, and affirm the dignity and worth of the other. Emotional literacy is costly, not only enabling one to “read” the sometimes difficult situation of another, but freeing one to be present to the other and in some way to restore their human spirit.

Fourth is social and cultural literacy: the ability to read and comprehend the events and signs of the times through the meaning-making lens of the Gospel. Social and cultural literacy lies at the heart of the Christian prophetic calling: to name things for what they are and to draw them into God’s care, a literacy that enables persons of Christian faith to reveal the reign of God.

It’s good to take a literacy test every now and again, to assess how well you are “reading” your faith in a world so in need of healing, restoration, wholeness, and true peace.

**MARY SHARON MOORE, M.T.S.**, is founding director of **AWAKENING VOCATIONS**, author of *Touching the Reign of God* (Wipf and Stock, 2009), and creator of the L.A.S.T. Workshop for workteam development. Her work in vocation discernment spans from Church ministry to animating organizations for work that touches the soul of the world. For more, visit [www.awakeningvocations.com](http://www.awakeningvocations.com).

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