

# What to do about voices from beyond this world

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Trisha asks, “Will God send me to hell for being able to hear spirits of people who have passed on to the other side? Would God be mad if I passed those messages to families that have lost someone?”

The Rev. Michael Nasser, who writes from an Eastern Christian perspective and is pastor of St. Nicholas Orthodox Christian Church, responds:

“Seeking and sharing messages from ‘beyond this world’ has always been discouraged in the Orthodox Christian Church. God has given us the Holy Scriptures which reveal His complete Truth to us. It is very difficult to know the source of so-called ‘supernatural’ messages, some of which may be evil spirits who seek to confuse us and lead us away from God’s love and truth. Our teaching is that being sent to Hell is the result of God’s righteous and just judgment when He justly sees our choices in this life that distance ourselves from Him. He honors our choice of destination in the next life by seeing what we choose freely in this one.”

The Rev. Kevin Niehoff, O.P., a Dominican priest who serves as judicial vicar, Diocese of Grand Rapids, responds:

“Roman Catholics teach, and these are my words, death is birth into eternal life. Fortunately, the Church has the tradition of the Cult of Saints, those individuals who have gone before marked with the sign of faith who are people we remember because of their goodness. I do believe that people who have been born into eternal life communicate with those of us who remain, likely in different ways. This is not an indication of something evil or wrong. What it tells us is that life is more than we may know in our present state.

“No, you will not be going to hell. One must always keep in mind the openness of the receiver. We believe that we are in communion with all who blazed the trail marked with the sign of faith. Who can say they do not speak to us who remain?”

The Rev. Linda Knieriemen, senior pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Holland, responds:

“No, I do not believe God will send you to hell because you are able to hear spirits of the deceased. And no, I don’t believe that God would be mad if you passed those messages to families of the deceased whose voices you hear. Having said that, there are other considerations inherent in this question. How do you know that the voices you hear are those of the dead? Some, not all, who hear voices are mentally ill. What is the benefit to the family to receive messages from their dead relatives or friends in this way? What are the potential emotional damages to the survivors of hearing a particular message you believe you have heard from their loved one? Proof of the source of such messages is impossible to ascertain, which leaves vast room for fraud, manipulation and false hopes — even if this isn’t your intent.

“A question to ask is what benefit is there in hearing a message from a deceased loved one? To learn the password to their Facebook account? To ensure forgiveness has been granted from harm inflicted in life? To prove the existence of God or heaven or any afterlife? To solve a family feud?

“I have heard many stories from parishioners of seeing or hearing or otherwise strongly sensing the presence of dead beloved. In my experience, those encounters have been life-giving, offered encouragement, strength and peace. These events are experienced as private, and often met with a skepticism which leads them to refrain from sharing widely. Those who have these experiences should never be perceived as crazy, ‘off’ or odd — especially if the experience confirms what is already known through other ways.

“Seeking communication with the dead and passing those messages on might be considered risky and rare and private.”

The Rev. Steven Manskar, pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in Grand Rapids, responds:

“This is a difficult question. My first response is to encourage this person to seek psychiatric care. Hearing voices is a common symptom of mental health conditions such as schizophrenia. If hearing voices is the result of mental health disorder, then I’m certain God will not condemn such a person. On the contrary, God desires healing and wholeness in the body, mind and soul.”

The Rev. Colleen Squires, minister at All Souls Community Church of West Michigan, a Unitarian Universalist Congregation, responds:

“Unitarian Universalists, those of us who believe in God, believe in a loving God and not a punishing God. For those of us who believe in life beyond this world, we believe in universal salvation, all souls go to heaven. If someone believed they were able to hear from the dead and wanted to pass a message along to another living being, they could do so without concern of retaliation. It is also true the person receiving the message has every right to ignore or acknowledge the information.”