

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart,
your loving ways—

Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.
And if you ever doubt yourself, remember us, who love you well—

We know all the gifts you bring into the world each day.

So thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart,
your loving ways,

Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.

—by Judy Fjell and Lisa Bregger

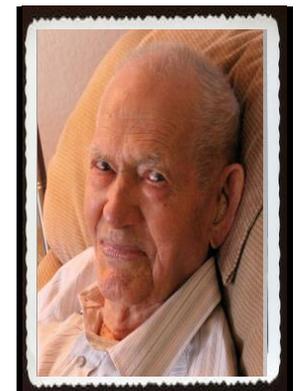
The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent, and to come to the group one last time and say good-bye if I need to quit
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people’s stories
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn

Covenant Groups

Snapshots of My Life



Snapshots of My Life

Chalice Lighting

We come together in an attitude of openness—not knowing quite what will happen, yet daring to receive a new idea, a new experience, sustenance for our minds and our hearts.

We come with an attitude of humility, knowing how much we need one another, how alone we can be in the world, how vulnerable if we face life solely by ourselves.

We come in the spirit of love, seeking human warmth and fellowship in the hands and faces of those around us.

—Adapted from Peter Lee Scott

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings

As I reflect back on these photos, they all represent a time, truly a snapshot, in my life when I felt carefree. Even if that feeling was an illusion upon closer inspection, it was what it felt like in that moment—that was the reality. This project helped me to remember that part of myself, the carefree, fun, empowered, unencumbered self, still exists.

—Linda Myers

Don't try to capture a man in one synthetic portrait, but rather in lots of snapshots taken at different times and in different circumstances!

—Aleksander Rodchenko

Snapshots of feelings, images, perceptions define the abstract soul.

—Samantha Long

It is by speaking and listening to each other that out of the darkness of our separate mysteries is brought to light the truth of who we are.

—Frederick Buechner

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening

Round 1: The facilitator will pose a question related to the topic, and everyone has an opportunity to respond briefly.

Round 2: Everyone can speak about how you felt about this topic, something that touched you, a story you want to share.

Round 3: In the final round, the facilitator may introduce another question or the group may continue sharing as they have been.

During the sharing, one person speaks at a time into an appreciative silence. The only responses are non-verbal, although the leader may express thanks if that seems comfortable. A brief moment of silence between speakers lets the sharing “sink in.” Then, going in any order, the next person will share. This may seem awkward at first, but most groups find it very satisfying once they get used to it.

The one who is sharing has the job of speaking deeply from their heart about the topic. Listeners have the task of keeping an open heart to what is shared. The facilitator is responsible for helping speakers stay in their allotted time. It is assumed that everyone in the group will speak, but if someone does not want to speak, they may pass.

Closing Words

Each of us brings a separate truth here,

We bring the truth of our own life, our own story.

We don't come as empty vessels.

But rather we come as full people—people who have our own story
and our own truth.

This room is rich with truth, rich with experience . . .

We gather together.

Together we have truths.

Together we have a story.

Together we are a community.

—Penny Hackett-Evans, adapted

Closing Song

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business

Homework for the next meeting.

Leader's Guide: Snapshots of My Life

- Put out nametags and markers.
- Put out a list of members with their phone numbers and e-mail addresses.
- As people arrive, ask them to check that their phone number and e-mail are correct.

Chalice Lighting (5 min)

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin as you light the chalice.

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Brief Introductions (10 min)

Go around the circle, each person telling one thing they hope for in this covenant group. (*Go first to model.*)

Silence (3 min)

Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence.

Group Business (5 min)

Tell everyone how glad you are that they are in the group and how much you're looking forward to getting to know them. Also tell them the following:

- “Usually any business is handled at the end of the meeting, and is quite brief. Today it is early in the meeting and will be longer since we're just beginning.”
- “Each meeting will last an hour and a half to two hours and will be centered on a particular topic. The topic for the next meeting will be given out at the end of the current meeting.”
- “The group will meet for approximately six to seven months.”
- Tell the group where the bathroom is.
- Have everyone look at the covenant on back of the bulletin, and then have the group read it. Ask one person to read the first covenant. Ask if there are any comments or problems. Can everyone agree to this? Continue through all the covenants.

Shared Readings (5 min)

Go around your group, letting each person in turn read one sentence of the first reading. Continue around the circle, reading the following selections.

Introduce Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (5 min)

Tell the group that deep sharing and deep listening is the core of the covenant group. It is a unique way of sharing and listening, so the group will spend a few minutes getting acquainted with this process. Going around the circle, have each person read one paragraph at a time from the bulletin.

Round 1: The facilitator will pose a question related to the topic, and everyone has an opportunity to respond briefly.

Round 2: Everyone can speak about how you felt about this topic, something that touched you, a story you want to share.

Round 3: In the final round, the facilitator may introduce another question or the group may continue sharing as they have been.

During the sharing, one person speaks at a time into an appreciative silence. The only responses are non-verbal, although the leader may express thanks if that seems comfortable. A brief moment of silence between speakers lets the sharing “sink in.” Then, going in any order, the next person will share. This may seem awkward at first, but most groups find it very satisfying once they get used to it.

The one who is sharing has the job of speaking deeply from their heart about the topic. Listeners have the task of keeping an open heart to what is shared. The facilitator is responsible for helping speakers stay in their allotted time. It is assumed that everyone in the group will speak, but if someone does not want to speak, they may pass.

Ask for questions.

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (45 min)

Round 1: Tell them: “There will only be one round of sharing at this first meeting since we’ve spent extra time going over the covenant and the deep sharing process. We’ll share our three snapshots with one another; we’ll each have about five to six minutes each. Since we want everyone to have a chance to share, I’ll wave at you when you have about a minute left. You may not have time to explain everything you had planned. Don’t worry; we have six months with one another, so there will be lots of time to share more fully. Tonight is just the start.”

(Go first to share as a model for the rest.)

Closing Words (2 min)

Each of us brings a separate truth here,
We bring the truth of our own life, our own story.
We don’t come as empty vessels.
But rather we come as full people—people who have our own story and our own truth.
This room is rich with truth, rich with experience . . .
We gather together.
Together we have truths.
Together we have a story.
Together we are a community.
——*Penny Hackett-Evans, adapted*

Closing Song (2 min)

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business (2 min)

Pass out the homework for next time.

Welcome to a Covenant Group!

Dear covenant group member,

We are so happy you have agreed to be in this covenant group. We want to give you information about our first meeting, and we also want to know that you have received this information.

So **please respond to this e-mail/letter**, which will let us know that we got your e-mail/address right and that you have the information for the first meeting. Simply reply and let us know that you got this information. Thanks. There is a waiting list for covenant groups, so please let us know if you are unable to be in this group. We understand that schedules and circumstances change. Just let us know so your spot can be given to another person.

Our Meetings

Our group will begin at *(time)* _____ on *(date)* _____
at *(put church room or address)* _____.

The sessions usually last for about an hour and a half to two hours.

We will be meeting on *(the 1st & 3rd OR 2nd % 4th)* _____
Monday/Tuesday, etc.) _____.

Facilitators for the group: *(your names and phone and e-mail)* _____
(your names and phone and e-mail) _____

Please bring \$ _____ for the materials/administrative fee if you did not pay at the sign-up.

Preparation for the First Session: Snapshots of My Life

Bring three snapshots of yourself. You might choose:

- a picture of your baby or childhood years,
- one as a teenager or young adult, and
- and one current picture.

You will use the pictures to introduce yourself to the group as you tell what your life was like in those years. We will be using these snapshots as a way of beginning to get to know one other. You will only have about five minutes to share your pictures, so decide what you especially want to share.

These quotes may help you get started:

A good snapshot stops a moment from running away.

—Eudora Welty

Everyone's story matters . . . Hidden in all stories is the One story. The more we listen, the clearer that story becomes. Our true identity, who we are, why we are here, what sustains us, is in this story. In telling stories, we are telling each other the human story.

—Rachel Remen, *adapted*

A picture is a poem without words.

—Horace

Leader's Guide: Snapshots of My Life

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