

# Bulletin for Sharing Our Histories

## 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.

*Peter Lee Scott, adapted*

## Brief Introductions

**Silence** - holding ourselves and each other in silent support

## Business

## Shared Readings

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool.

To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.

To reach out for another is to risk exposing our true self.

To place our ideas before the crowd is to risk certainty.

To dream aloud is to risk accountability.

To love is to risk not being loved in return.

To hope is to risk despair.

To try is to risk failure.

To reach out is to risk rejection.

To live is to risk dying.

To fear risk is to never live.

*Leo Buscaglia*

When I see you with worry on your brow and shadows in your eyes, and I say to you, “What’s up?” remind me gently that I was not there when you made that journey to the center of your soul. Tell me as kindly as you can that I am sleeping when night clutches at you and you are driven to a place in your heart which is ever night. Do not let me say, “Don’t worry,” when worry is all you know and it feels as if worry is all you’ll ever know.

For none of us ever really walks in another’s shoes or knows the innermost rooms of a person’s heart. None of us truly knows the lonely places of another’s journey or the causes of the lines around another’s eyes. Therefore, let us be gentle with one another. Let us listen more than we speak and accept more than we judge. Let our open, outstretched hands reach and touch that we may walk along together for a little while in friendship and in trust. *Elizabeth Tarbox, Life Tides*

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*

## **Introduce 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** Each person can speak about how you felt about the topic, a way you grew, something that touched you in the preparation materials, a story you want to share.

**Round 3** As time allows, share additional thoughts on the topic or reflect on what others have shared.

During the sharing, one person speaks at a time, into an appreciative silence. The only responses are nonverbal, although the facilitator 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.

## **Deep Sharing and Deep Listening Round**

**Round 1** We’ll share our histories with one another.

## **Closing Words**

### **Song**

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

## **The Covenant**

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to let the leader know if I will be absent or need to quit
- 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 do the reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others
- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, or giving advice
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn.

# Facilitator Notes for Sharing Our Histories

## Before the Session

Obtain name tags and markers. Make sure you have a list of group members with phone numbers and email addresses.

For this session, make copies of the Bulletin for each member. For subsequent sessions, members may be comfortable printing their own materials.

The Covenant Group materials use the song “Thank You For Your Loving Hands” to close each meeting. If you need copies, ask the Covenant Group steering committee for assistance. Think about how you will introduce this song to your group.

## Before the session begins

- Put out the name tags and markers. As people arrive, ask each to make a name tag.
- Put out the list of members.
- As people arrive, ask them to check that their phone numbers and emails are correct.

## Chalice Lighting

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

*Peter Lee Scott, adapted*

## Brief Introductions (about a minute each)

Go around the circle, with each person telling one thing they hope for in this covenant group.

**Silence** - holding ourselves and each other in silent support

Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence.

## Business

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

- Each meeting will last an hour and a half to two hours and will be centered on a particular topic. The topics are found on the church website under covenant groups. Discuss whether members are comfortable printing their own materials, or whether you should print for them.
- You will meet for 14 meetings.
- Tell them where the bathroom is.
- Usually any business is handled at the beginning of the meeting, and is quite brief. Today it is longer since you’re just beginning.
- Look at the covenant at the end of the bulletin. Have the group read it. Ask one person to read the first covenant. Are there any comments or problems? Can everyone agree to this? Continue through all the covenants.

## Shared Readings

Go around your group, letting each person in turn read one sentence of the first reading. Continue to go around the circle, with one reader reading the Tarbox selection and one the Buechner selection.

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To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.  
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*Elizabeth Tarbox, Life Tides*

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*

## Introduce Deep Sharing and Deep Listening

Tell them that deep sharing and deep listening is the core of a 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 “Introduce Deep Sharing and Deep Listening” section of the Bulletin, starting with “Round 1.”

**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 the topic, a way you grew, something that touched you in the preparation materials, a story you want to share.

**Round 3** As time allows, share additional thoughts on the topic or reflect on what others have shared.

During the sharing, one person speaks at a time, into an appreciative silence. The only responses are nonverbal, although the facilitator 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 Round** (about 5-6 minutes each)

**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 histories with one another. We’ll 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**

Read the following by Penny Hackett-Evans, adapted:

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.

### **Closing Song**

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

### **The Covenant**

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## 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 email/letter**, which will let us know that we got your email/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) \_\_\_\_\_ in the (church room) \_\_\_\_\_. The sessions usually last for about an hour and a half. We will be meeting on \_\_\_ (the 1st and 3rd OR 2nd and 4th) Monday/Tuesday, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Facilitators for the group: (name, phone, email) \_\_\_\_\_  
and \_\_\_\_\_

Please bring \$5 to cover the materials/administrative fee for the Covenant Group season.

### Preparation for the First Session: Sharing Our Histories

Please prepare some sort of pictorial representation of your life up until now: a collage, a timeline, a map, or whatever else appeals to you. Focus especially on your religious and/or spiritual background and major life transitions or crises. We will be using this pictorial representation as a way of introducing ourselves and getting to know each other.

This quote may help you get started:

Everyone's story matters. The wisdom in the story of the most educated and powerful person is often not greater than the wisdom in the story of a child, and the life of a child can teach us as much as the life of a sage. 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. Stories that touch us in this place of common human-ness awaken us and weave us together as a family once again.

*Rachel Remen, adapted*