

Facilitator Notes for Connecting

Preparation before the first meeting

For *all* meetings, bring name tags, a marker, a chalice and matches or lighter if needed.

Preparation for this session

- Obtain index cards, markers, and pens. A larger card, such as a 5 x 8, will probably be best.
- Make sure you have a list of group members with phone numbers and email addresses.
- Make copies of the Bulletin for each member. For subsequent sessions, members may be comfortable printing their own materials.
- Figure out what song or bowl/chime you want to use to end the meeting and make suitable preparations, such as copying words or borrowing hymnals from the church.

Before the session begins

- Put out the adhesive name tags, markers, index cards (for Name-Info) and pens or pencils.
- Put out the list of members, with a pen to make any corrections.
- Make a **Name-Info** card using your own information and leave it on the table as an example.

As people arrive . . .

- Ask them to check that their phone numbers and emails are correct.
- Ask them to make an adhesive name tag with their name.
- Give each an index card and a pen to make a **Name-Info** card with this information:
 - Center:** The name you wish to be called.
 - Upper Left:** A group that is important to you.
 - Upper Right:** An activity that makes you feel connected.
 - Lower Left:** A place that means a lot to you.
 - Lower Right:** A person such as a musician, author, poet, artist, social activist or scientist whose work has meaning for you.

Chalice Lighting

Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words but pouring them all right out—just as they are—chaff and grain together, certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping—and with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away.

Dinah Marie Mullock Craik

Introductions (about 3 min each person)

Ask group members to introduce themselves using the information written on their cards.

Silence (3 min)

Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence.

Group Business (10 min)

Tell them how glad you are they are in the group and how much you're looking forward to getting to know them.

Basics

- Tell them that there are 14 sessions, each lasting an hour and a half to two hours.

- Tell them where the bathroom is.
- Usually any business is handled briefly at the beginning of the meeting, but today is longer.
- Tell them how to find the materials and their location on the new church website. From the new UUABQ.com home page, choose the menu item Connect, then Covenant Groups, then 2015-16 Materials.
- Discuss whether members are comfortable printing their own materials.
- Discuss your song or chime choices or preferences.

Being Together in this Group

The facilitator asks members to share their hopes for the group and leads a brief discussion on inclusion.

1. Ask members to go around the circle and say what they hope to get out of being in a covenant group. Also ask them to mention whether they have been in a covenant group before or know other members, either from covenant groups or from other circumstances.
2. If there are any members who have been in a group together before, ask group members: a) what does it take to make you feel comfortable in a group where you are a new member and others are not b) what should the “returning” members do? What should they not do?

Examples: *Don't* spend time before or after the meeting catching up with each other or setting up private meetings, especially in front of newcomers. *Don't* say “Last year we did it this way.”

Do include others, especially newcomers, in conversations before and after meetings.

The Covenant

Look through the covenant at the end of the bulletin. Ask the group to read it silently. Then ask one person to read the first covenant item aloud. Are there any comments or problems? Can everyone agree to this? Continue through all the covenants.

Shared Readings

Ask one person to read the first reading. Then go around the group, letting each person in turn continue the next reading.

We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads and along these sympathetic fibers, our actions run as causes and return to us as results. *Herman Melville*

When we are with Nature we are awake, and we discover many interesting things and reach many a mark we are not aiming at. *John Muir*

It is not accidental that all phenomena of human life are dominated by the search for daily bread—the oldest link connecting all living things, man included, with the surrounding nature. *Ivan Pavlov*

Society is the soul writ large. *Plato*

In the Buddhist tradition, our connections are real; our separations are an illusion. . . . If you and I are ultimately connected, you cannot be other. You cannot be an alien, a foreigner. If I do not know you I do not yet know a part of my self. When you and I are separated, neither of us is whole. *Peter Morales*

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 “Introducing Deep Sharing and Deep Listening” section of the Bulletin. Start with the Thich Nhat Hanh section, continue through Rounds 1, 2, and 3, and conclude with the two paragraphs of explanation.

In a talk on “Living Together in Harmony,” Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh (pronounced “Tik Nyat Hawn”) discusses deep listening. Here are his words.

We have begun to learn about a method of deep listening. As we already know, we have to practice before we can listen deeply.

Sometimes we can also translate “deep listening” as compassionate listening, that is, to listen with compassion, or to listen with love.

We hear with one aim only; we don’t listen in order to criticize, to blame, to correct the person who is speaking or to condemn the person. We only listen with one aim, and that is to relieve the suffering of the one we are listening to.

We have to sit still, we have to sit with inner freedom, and we have to be one hundred percent present, body and mind, listening so the other can relieve his or her suffering. . . .

If we can sit for an hour, that is a golden hour. That hour is an hour which can heal and transform.
Thich Nhat Hanh

Our approach to Covenant Groups uses three rounds of sharing.

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 members 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.

When the group has finished reading, ask for questions.

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening Round

Tell them: “There will only be one round of sharing at this meeting since we’ve spent extra time going over the covenant and the deep sharing process. We’ll share the connections on our mind maps, taking about five or 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 talk about everything, but don’t worry, because there will be time to share more fully in the months we have together. Tonight is just the start.”

Go first to share as a model for the rest. As people share, pay close attention to the allotted time so that all members have the opportunity.

Round 1 (about 5 or 6 minutes each person)

Share the connections on the mind map you made. Did you discover anything new about what links are most important in your life?

Rounds 2 and 3 will be skipped for this session because of the time necessary for business and explanations.

Closing Words (In Unison)

May we be reminded here of our highest aspiration.
And inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity.

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings
But connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe,
To this community and to each other.
Anonymous (#434 in Hymnal)

Song or Chime

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 facilitator know if I will be absent or need to quit
- to share with the facilitator 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.