

Facilitator Notes for Getting to Know Each Other

Preparation for the first meeting

- Bring name tags, a marker or two, and pencils and pens for the Words of the Day. You will bring these to *all* meetings.
- Bring a list of participants' names, phone numbers, and email addresses.
- Bring basket and slips of paper (approx. 2" x 5½") for Words of the Day.
- Bring copies of the Gathering for participants to use.
- Bring a chime or copies of song possibilities for ending
- Bring an electric candle for a chalice. *If you don't have one, contact the covenant group steering committee to get one.*

Before the meeting begins

- On a full sheet of paper, write the prompt for the Words of the Day: I was drawn to a covenant group because ...
- Write your own Words of the Day ahead of time.

As participants arrive

- Hand them slips of paper and invite them to write a few phrases for the **Words of the Day**. Collect the slips in a basket, then shuffle them so that privacy is maintained.
- Ask each person to check the list of the group for accuracy of name, phone, and email.
- Collect \$5.00 from each person. If they don't have it, tell them they can bring it next time.

The Gathering

Chalice Lighting *(Read or ask for a volunteer)*

We light this chalice to shine on our time together. In its light we celebrate the relationships and understanding we are creating in this place and time. May our sharing be deep. *(Light chalice)*

The Basket *(Read the first slip and begin passing the basket around)*

Introductions (10 minutes)

We usually have a check-in time here. Today we are using this time to introduce ourselves briefly. Let's take about a minute each to tell about ourselves. For instance, you might tell us how long you've been at 1st UU and what job or activities you're involved in. *(Go first to model.)*

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support (3 minutes)

Business (15 minutes)

Usually any business is handled at the end of the meeting and is quite brief. Today it is longer since we're just beginning.

Basics

- Tell everyone how glad you are that they are in the group and how much you're looking forward to getting to know them.
- Each gathering will last an hour and a half to two hours and will be centered on a particular topic. Today's topic is getting to know a little about each other.
- We will meet for fourteen gatherings.
- Ask participants to let you know if they need to miss or come late to a meeting.
- Announce the location of the bathrooms and other information they may need.
- Give instructions on how to access topic preparation on the church website.

Being Together in this Group

The facilitator leads a brief discussion on inclusion.

1. Ask members to go around the circle and say whether they have been in a covenant group before or know other members, either from covenant groups or from other circumstances.
2. Invite the group to consider: if you didn't know anyone in a group, what would it take for you to feel comfortable when some people already knew each other? What should the "acquainted" members do, and 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 at the covenant together. Ask one participant to read the first item in the covenant. Explain or elaborate if needed. Ask whether there are any comments or problems. Can everyone agree to this? Continue through all the items in 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, giving advice, or advocating a specific view
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn and to stay on the "I-message."

Shared Readings

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.

Penny Hackett-Evans

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*

I suspect that the most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention ... When people are talking, there's no need to do anything but receive them. *Rachel Naomi Remen*

Introducing the Deep Sharing and Deep Listening

Members will go around the circle, each reading a paragraph in the following exploration of deep sharing and deep listening.

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.

~ ~ ~

Read or explain this: Deep sharing and deep listening make up the core of a covenant group. It is a unique way of sharing and listening, so we want to spend a few minutes getting acquainted with this process.

Ask three participants to read aloud one each of the paragraphs below. Explain or elaborate as needed as you go along.

Rounds of Sharing. There are two rounds of sharing. During each round, one person speaks at a time. The job of listeners is to listen deeply keeping their hearts open. The speakers share from the heart as deeply as they are willing.

Round 1: Each person in the group takes five to six minutes to reflect aloud on the preparation materials about the topic. The leader starts. Everyone who wants to speak gets one turn, in any order they choose. Anyone may pass. At the conclusion of a participant's comments, the group leader may say thank you, but there is no further discussion, just a few breaths of silence. Then the next person speaks.

Round 2: This is an opportunity to share additional thoughts as well as thoughts prompted by what others have shared. The speaker still focuses on their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences – this is not about debating issues. Everyone who wants to speak gets a turn, in whatever order they choose, until the time runs out. It's everybody's responsibility to ensure that all who want to speak get a chance and that no one is dominating.

Read or explain: Some participants may feel a little uncomfortable with the lack of response after someone has shared. Be assured that, in time, this silence during and after the sharing can become a powerful, sacred time. One group leader explained it this way, "When listeners have been allowed into the recesses of the speaker's life, there is a rich intimacy. Silence seems to be the best response." Some groups respond to sharing with a nod, a placing of their hands together and a bowing of the head. These are all attempts to say, "Your sharing was deep, courageous, and touching. Thank you." Give yourself a few gatherings to get used to this new way of listening and sharing.

So that each person has an equal opportunity to share, we will keep an eye on the time. Some groups use a timer, then signal when the speaker has 15-30 seconds left. The signal can be a small wave, a tiny bell, or a rain stick.

Sharing (60 minutes)

At each gathering we will have a time of sharing on a specific topic. Today each of you have brought an item that symbolizes, for you, a deep and meaningful part of your life. You will have approximately 5-6 minutes to share this item and its meaning. I'll start. When I'm done, in any order, each of you can share. We'll have a bit of silence after each sharing.

Closing Circle

Now we will go around the circle. Each person says a word or two, maybe a sentence, about what you are taking away from the session or how you are feeling. (*Ask the person next to you if it is ok for them to be next. Then start.*)

Extinguishing the Chalice (*Read or ask for volunteer or read in unison*)

We extinguish this flame and we remember the warmth of our community, the light of our wisdom, the generosity of our sharing. We keep these in our heart until we meet again. (*Extinguish the chalice.*)

Song/Chime

The group or facilitator can decide on whether to sing a song or play a chime or gong.

Announcements (*Announce topic for next time*)