

Hearing Each Other Is a Two-Way Street

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At the core of each small group ministry session is deep listening. Facilitators pose questions and each participant responds in turn. The other group members provide the speaker with rapt attention. They don't ask questions; they don't give advice—they listen deeply. As more and more congregants get involved in small group ministry, the issue of hearing, which is critical to deep listening, becomes ever more significant.

With this concern in mind, members of the Hearing Committee of the Elder Focus Taskforce of the UU Church of Bloomington, Indiana took part in the facilitator training session for this year's Chalice Circles (Small Group Ministry). Committee members emphasized that hearing each other is a two-way street. They told about microphone/speaker equipment, available at the church, to help with small group interaction. Most significantly, they shared a number of simple communication strategies for all Chalice Circles members to use to improve hearing and therefore deep listening. For example, they recommended that facilitators adjust the environment in which Chalice Circle sessions are held, by reducing background noise, the greatest interference with hearing, by arranging the room so that participants sit close together, and by choosing to meet in a place with good lighting for members who rely on visual cues when listening.

The Hearing Committee suggested that good communication practices be reinforced when creating group covenants—not interrupting, facing each other, addressing the whole group, pausing between speakers, and avoiding cross talk. They also recommended that procedures to follow when members cannot hear someone else be written explicitly into group covenants.

Chalice Circles are about openness and accessibility. With these communication strategies in place, we hope that this year we will not have Chalice Circle participants withdrawing because of unresolved hearing challenges.