

*From our Members.....*

## **FIRST MONDAY NIGHT OF THE MONTH**

**Facilitator/ Leadership Training**

*Mary Ann Terry, Charleston, SC*

Several years ago at the UU Church of Charleston, SC, we created "Suggested Guidelines" for all our covenant groups, called Connecting Circles. This year those guidelines became the tools for our Facilitator training at our monthly Monday night meetings. One guideline was highlighted each month. Facilitators Meetings use the SGM format so we can practice as we learn.

### **Suggested Guidelines**

**Focus on Spiritual Development** - A Connecting Circle is a small group that meets monthly in a member's home to participate in *small group ministry*. The intent is to grow and appreciate the spiritual journey that is fundamental to our lives. The vision was that members would share philosophic and spiritual topics, respect each others' views, share life experiences, have fun, and serve the church.

**Making "I" Statements** - One person at a time speaks while the group listens. It is best to speak from the "I". There should be no interruptions and little feedback. This process allows the guidance to come from within. The speaker stands alone with the truth of his/her own experience and we learn to look inside rather than outside ourselves for direction. Trust yourself enough to allow what is there to just emerge. It is all right to pass. Sometimes there is nothing to say or nothing to say *yet*. Be careful not to talk to please others, but to listen to yourself and others.

**Listening Without an Agenda** - This sounds easy, but it isn't. It requires that we suspend our own inner dialogue and refrain from assessing what the other person is saying. It doesn't require agreement, disagreement, interpretations or solutions. We practice empathy and truly experience what the speaker's world is like when they are speaking and the rest of the group is *actively and attentively listening*. It means focusing on the present moment, without thinking about what you will say when it is your turn, or how you can "help" the speaker.

**Rotating Leadership** - This practice allows each member to take the group in their own direction when their turn comes. It encourages members to step out of the roles we usually take and learn to expand in other ways. The shy can stretch to reveal themselves. The talkative can learn patience. It allows us to share investment and ownership in the group equally. Decisions are usually made by consensus rather than by a vote.

**Confidentiality** - The degree of individual growth that occurs in a group is dependent upon how much intimacy develops. That intimacy, in turn, depends on trust. People must know that what they say in the group will not be repeated outside the group. We can create a safe space where we feel comfortable sharing sensitive and fragile parts of ourselves as part of the growth and healing process.

**Responsibility for One's Own Needs** - Many of us are trained to be co-dependent. To get away from this, it is important that each member ask for what they need rather than expecting the group to know and respond appropriately in all situations. It is acceptable to decline to participate in an exercise or topic; the group does not have to change its plans to keep everyone happy at all times.

**Commitment** - The group sustains itself because each member comes every time. The group cannot sustain itself without this commitment: agreeing to be together and to make the group a priority. There is accountability to each other and to ones self to show up. You are important to the group's existence!

To continue successfully, the group should take time periodically to step back and observe itself. We can then assess if we're growing, having fun, and staying aligned with our purpose as a group.

-Taken from the Small Group Ministry Network Quarterly, Winter 2009