

## **Acceptance and Challenges**

Small Group Ministry Session, Unitarian Universalist Church in Eugene, Oregon, March 2010

CHALICE OR CANDLE LIGHTING OR SOUND A CHIME (2 to 3 minutes for this and silence and opening words)

MOMENT OF SILENCE

OPENING WORDS

We need one another when things happen in our lives over which we lack influence. We need loving reassurance of the worth of our being.

We need one another when we are spared from harm. We need to feel our gratitude with wonder and without guilt.

We need one another when we are called upon to make decisions that are contrary to another's thoughts or well-being. We need compassion for the situation and for ourselves.

We need one another when we hear of tragedies not directly related to us. We need to feel the oneness with humanity.

In all of these things, we need one another.

(By Helen Zidowecki)

CHECK-IN (Up to 20 to 30 minutes, 2 to 3 minutes per person)

TOPIC AND SHARING (Up to 70 minutes for reading, questions and sharing with optional 5 minute break about midway in the session)

READINGS

So what is really the path of healing? It can begin in this moment, by embracing the life that's here. Because if we can begin to bring a sense of peace and care to the life inside us, naturally the circles widen to include other people. It's the way of the heart—if we can be kind towards ourselves we'll be kind towards others... When some people talk about accepting themselves they have this fear that they're condoning some bad behavior, or that if they accept themselves, that means they'll never improve. But in the moment of accepting, we're not condoning. We're just acknowledging the truth of what's here, with kindness. The reality is, if we can do that, it actually begins to free us so we can, in the next moment, be a lot wiser. One of the great psychologists, Carl Rogers, put it this way, "It wasn't until I accepted myself just as I was in this moment, that I was free to change." So a pre-condition to true transformation, is to accept ourselves in the moment.

(Adapted from interview with Tara Brach, PhD)

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

(By Reinhold Niebuhr)

Within the church we need to love people as they are, warts and all, AND we need to help them become more devoted, generous, compassionate, faithful people.

(By Roy M. Oswald and Barry Johnson in "Managing Polarities in Congregations Eight Keys for Thriving Faith Communities")

The job of the newspaper is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable.

(By Finley Peter Dunn, and also described by many people as the job of the minister and the church)

**QUESTIONS** (Please respond to whichever question or questions you feel moved to answer. It is not necessary to respond to all of the questions.)

1. Describe a situation where there was a challenge balancing acceptance of what is, and of wanting things to be different. What has been helpful, or not, for dealing with this polarity/paradox/dilemma?
2. Tell about a time when you gave up the struggle against something that could not be changed. How did you feel?
3. Describe a time when you did not accept something as is was, worked toward change, and found it satisfying and rewarding. What gave you the energy or hope to work for that change?
4. Describe your experience trying to balance the polarity of acceptance and nurture with challenge and transformation in a church community, other group, or family.

**SHARING** (up to 6 to 8 minutes each, depending on the time available, with time at the end for comment and discussion if the group wishes)

**ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS** (service project, future meeting dates and topics, etc.) (Up to 5 to 10 minutes)

- Confirm next meeting date, time, location, and topic.
- Consider discussing the service project.

**LIKES** (celebrations, gratitudes, appreciations for needs met) and **WISHES** (mournings, requests, acknowledgements of needs not met)/check-out (a few words or phrases from each who wants to share, up to 5 minutes total)

**CLOSING WORDS** (2 minutes)

As we leave this community of the spirit, may we remember the difficult lesson that each day offers more things than we can do.

May we do what needs to be done, postpone what does not, and be at peace with what we can be and do.

Therefore, may we learn to separate that which matters most, and that which matters least of all.

(Adapted from Richard S. Gilbert)

**EXTINGUISH THE CHALICE OR CANDLE OR SOUND A CHIME** (and additional optional closing ritual if agreed to)

(Preparation for the facilitator. Please bring the SGM Facilitator Training Manual, paper and writing implements, the lesson plan, and your date book.)

Lesson plan prepared by the Small Group Ministry Steering Committee curriculum subcommittee (Rev. Stephen A. Ames, Dick Loescher, Leora White) 2/10/10