

Our Group

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, June 2014

Rev. Margie Allen and Rev. Dr. Linda Anderson

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

Listening is the oldest and perhaps the most powerful tool of healing. It is often through the quality of our listening and not the wisdom of our words that we are able to effect the most profound changes in the people around us....Our listening creates sanctuary for the homeless parts within the other person. Listening creates a holy silence. When you listen generously to people, they can hear truth in themselves, often for the first time. And in the silence of listening, you can know yourself in everyone. ~Rachel Naomi Remen

Silence

Check-in: Summer Plans?

Reading of Our Covenant

Topic Introduction (this section has 3 parts)

[To be read by the Facilitator of each Circle]

A. (Determine this in a conversation now, or defer to the end of the session.)

It's hard to believe that we are already into the month of June, on the cusp of summer! During July and August some Sharing Circles will continue to meet and others will take a summer break. *What would this group like to do in July and August?*

B. (Ask people to let you know by the end of the evening if possible.)

I need to know whether you would like

to commit to another September to June "season" with this Sharing Circle
to join a new Circle in September and commit to attending that circle through June
to drop out of the Sharing Circle Small Group Ministry program for now

There are advantages to all three options. This may be a Circle in which you feel comfortable, free to share, able to learn about others in a spirit of curiosity and compassion. It might be that these relationships will deepen over another year in such a way as to provide an even stronger container for deep sharing, growth, caring and learning. During the 2014-15 congregational year, members of this group may leave and newcomers enter and become integrated, so there will be enough changes to keep the dynamic lively.

But sometimes what you need is a change, or a different style of facilitation or you may just want to focus on meeting and engaging with more people you do not know well or at all. Maybe your own schedule has changed and you need to meet on a different night. If any of this is how you are feeling, you might want to sign up for a different Circle.

The focus of our lives shifts in time and you may find yourself drawn to other activities at this point or to a period of rest. If it feels right to leave this Circle and the Sharing Circle Program for a while, know that you can step back in at any time, even in the middle of the

congregational year. Whenever you are ready, we will work within our limitations as a growing program to place you in a group that has openings and meets at a time that works for you.

C. We have covered a wide range of topics. Hopefully our coming together and discussions have stayed true to the Sharing Circle mission and purposes:

Our Mission: *“We practice the art of speaking and listening from the heart as a path to making deeper connections with others and with ourselves.”*

Our Purposes:

The Sharing Circles program seeks to achieve its mission by creating a “safe space” in which to

- develop and clarify personal values, beliefs and theology;
- explore feelings, needs and stories
- care for one another during times of trouble and celebration;
- connect to a cadre of new friends and deepen those connections over time;
- build commitment to each other and to our faith community;
- teach, learn and model group facilitation skills.

Questions for Group Reflection

Looking at the Mission and the Purposes of Sharing Circles, can you see ways in which they have been furthered for you personally? Can you share some experiences of that?

Take a minute to look over again our Sharing Circle covenant. What aspects of our covenant have you most struggled to uphold? Why? What agreement in either covenant have you been most grateful for? Why?

In this Circle, we tell the truth about our lives and we take time to speak in ways we do not often speak with one another. What has the experience of speaking this way meant to you? Have you found yourself speaking differently, more deeply, to others in your life?

How about listening? Have you found yourself listening differently for your experience in this Circle? Has being part of a Sharing Circle changed the way you handle relationships? Can you give an example?

As you think back over the topics we considered this year, what are a few of your most vivid memories of insight, fun, connection, surprise, or emotional reaction? Which sessions had the deepest and most lasting impact? If there were any topics that seemed to you to go nowhere, why do you think they did not generate energy?

September: Repair
October: Games
November: Gender
December: Food
January: Fears

February: Travel
March: Death
April: Animals
May: Information Technology
June: Our Group

Take a moment to list a few topics you think would be interesting to focus on in the future? ***(Please record the topics that are mentioned and send them to Linda Anderson in the next week or so).***

Quotations

Closing the Circle for the Year

[Facilitators: Have index cards ready to circulate, enough for each member of your group, including yourself and anyone who is absent. On the top of each card write the name of a member of the Circle and the phrase "I appreciate about you"]

Hand the card with their own name on it to every person, including yourself. Keep the card/s for the absent people/person with your own and put them into circulation when you can.

Ask everyone to complete the phrase written on the top of the card, writing as if speaking to the person whose name is on the card. Note that each person is asked to write something on his/her own card first. Pass the cards to the left when everyone has finished writing and follow the same instructions for each person named until your own card comes back to you.

When all the cards have been around the circle, invite each group member to read aloud what others have said about him/her. Encourage people to read their own card. It is a powerful thing to read such affirmations out loud yourself. If anyone really needs to have someone else read it, that's OK too.

Closing Words and Chalice Extinguishing (Max Coats, adapted)

(Maybe ask each person to read until there is a period.)

Let us give thanks for a bounty of people:

For generous friends, with smiles as bright as their blossoms.

For feisty friends as tart as apples.

For continuous friends who, like scallions and cucumbers, keep reminding us that we've had them.

For crotchety friends, as sour as rhubarb and as indestructible.

For handsome friends, who are as gorgeous as eggplants and as elegant as a row of corn, and the others as plain as potatoes and as good for you.

For friends as unpretentious as cabbages, as subtle as summer squash, as persistent as parsley, as endless as zucchini, and who, like parsnips, can be counted on to see you through the winter.

For old friends, nodding like sunflowers in the evening-time.

For young friends, who wind around like tendrils and hold us.

We give thanks for friends now gone, like gardens past that have been harvested.

Who fed us in their times that we might live.

We are grateful.

Let us be grateful to people who make us happy, they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom. ~Marcel Proust

How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard. ~From the movie, *Annie*

In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit. ~Albert Schweitzer

A friend is one with whom you are comfortable, to whom you are loyal, through whom you are blessed, and for whom you are grateful. ~William Arthur Ward

Think to Thank. In these three words are the finest capsule course for a happy marriage, formula for enduring friendship, and a pattern for personal happiness. ~Thomas S. Monson

I awoke this morning with devout thanksgiving for my friends, the old and new.
~Ralph Waldo Emerson

Cherish your human connections: your relationships with friends and family. ~Barbara Bush

Look around you and appreciate those who care about you, be thankful they are in your life.
~Catherine Pulsifer

Namaste. I honor the place in you where the entire universe resides... a place of light, of love, of truth, of peace, of wisdom. I honor the place in you where, when you are in that place and I am in that place, there is only one of us. ~Mohandas K. Gandhi

Make it a habit to tell people thank you, to express your appreciation sincerely and without the expectation of anything in return. Truly appreciate those around you and you'll soon find many others around you. Truly appreciate life and you'll find that you have more of it.
~Ralph Marston

A sanctified relationship is one in which neither party silences nor sacrifices, and each is responsible for expressing his or her strength and vulnerability. Real closeness, I now know, cannot be pursued or demanded. Love is the passion of people clarifying their beliefs and values through each other. (Phoebe Eng)

Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but pouring them all 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 a breath of kindness blow the rest away. ~ George Eliot

I thank you for your voices. Thank you: your most sweet voices. ~Shakespeare