

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
CCUU Covenant Group Session
Our Stories and Compassionate Communication
Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist, Palatine, IL

Chalice Lighting and Reading

We gather today, sharing a common interest in communicating compassionately. We approach one another in a spirit of curiosity, with open minds and open hearts, with a view toward building a deeper sense of community and connection.

We approach each other in this space in a spirit of eager willingness – a willingness to share and to deeply listen to one another, and to discover something more about how we communicate and how we can improve our communication.

In this manner we seek renewal, spiritual meaning and growth – all in a context of compassionate communication with one another.

– Vid Axel, with inspiration from an adapted reading by Peter Lee Scott which was included in the *Covenant Group Facilitator Training* binder

Check In

- How are you today?
- What do you need to leave behind for a couple of hours in order to be fully present here?
- Quick joys or sorrows are welcome.

Transition Reading

Listening to another's need relieves the other person of frustration without the listener becoming in any way responsible for relieving it. That consciousness makes it possible to identify a need - "Would you really prefer to it differently?" - fearing neither to make things worse by twisting a knife in the wound nor to have to own the problem.

We need to stress the fact that often nothing in particular needs to be "done." And just being there doesn't necessarily take a long time.

From *Being Genuine: Stop Being Nice, Start Being Real*, by Thomas D'Ansembourg.

Our Stories and Compassionate Communication

Questions to consider:

- When have you communicated with someone (a friend, family member, acquaintance) where you were sorry afterwards for what you said or how you said it?
- Do you have relationships where the communication is typically strained? What background causes this breakdown in communication?
- Are there circumstances that cause you to “lose your cool” or communicate in ways that don’t achieve the result you want or in fact cause more difficulty because of your approach?

- Where have you handled a problem communication or relationship with positive outcomes? What did you do differently? What made it positive?

Round Two: What Others' Stories Stimulated in Oneself

Sharing/Listening, up to 3 minutes each for those who wished to share; each sharing interval followed by a one minute silent meditation.

Round Three: A Few Minutes of Back and Forth Conversation

“**Let go**” of the pattern and encourage a little back and forth interaction – or even a little, polite interruption here and there – for about twenty minutes. If anyone requests it, we can offer some support or even advice about skills during this time.

Check Out

- Invite people to express gratitude to other participants for expressing themselves
- Ask what people liked, and what they wish could be different
- Consider how we lived up to our kinship circle covenant

Closing Reading

Grateful for the opportunity to share this time and space together, we prepare to go now our separate ways, hopefully renewed by the energy of each other's company, hopefully invigorated by the opportunity to communicate compassionately.

As we have grown while were together, may we also grow while we are apart, may we be strengthened by the inspiration of the connection which we forged together today.

And may we remain so strengthened, until we meet again. (Vid Axel)

Marshall Rosenberg's story

[Compassionate Communication] doesn't require that we agree with the other person. It doesn't mean we have to like what they're saying. It means that we give them this precious gift of our presence, to be present at this moment to what's alive in them, that we are interested, sincerely interested in that. We don't do it as a psychological technique but because we want to connect with the beauty and the person at this moment.

Now, when we put this all together, it looks like this: we may start a dialogue with the other person by telling them what's alive in us and what we would like them to do to make life more wonderful for us. Then, no matter how they respond, we try to connect with what's alive in them and what would make life more wonderful for them. And we keep this flow of communication going until we find strategies to meet everybody's need.

We always want to be sure that whatever strategies people agree to they're agreeing out of the desire to contribute to the well-being of one another and not out of the reasons I've outlined that we want to avoid -- like submitting to punishment, guilt, etc. Many people believe that you cannot do this with some people. They believe that some people are so damaged that, no matter what communication you use, you're not going to arrive at this point. That has not been my experience.

I'm not saying that this connection always happens right away... Sometimes it's not easy to stay with that because my own cultural conditioning hasn't allowed me to be fluent in this from an early age, and learning this can be a real challenge.

I recall one time when I was first learning [Compassionate Communication], my older son and I were having a conflict. My first reaction to what he was saying was not to connect with what was alive in him, what he was feeling and needing. I wanted to jump in and show him he was wrong. I had to take a deep, deep breath. I needed to see what was going on in me for a moment and see that I was losing connection with him, then bring my attention back to him, saying, "So, you're feeling..." to try to connect with him.

Then he said something else, and again I got triggered and had to slow down and take a deep breath to be able to keep coming back to what was alive in him. Of course, all this was taking longer than usual in the conversation up to that point, and he had some friends waiting for him outside.

Finally, he said, "Daddy, it's taking you so long to talk."

I said, "Let me tell you what I can say quickly. Do it my way, or I'll kick your [ass]."

He said, "Take your time, Dad, take your time."

So, [Compassionate Communication] requires that we take our time to come from our divine energy rather than our cultural programming. (Marshall Rosenberg, *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict: What You Say Next Will Change Your World*, pages 91-93)

Preparation for CCUU Session Our Stories and Compassionate Communication

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Background Reading

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