

**Opening Words and Chalice Lighting**

“Across the distance, the light from within me shines, sending love to all  
Across the distance, your light is fuel that warms me  
and helps to keep my own light burning  
Together, we keep the flame of community burning bright” - *Laura Thompson*

**Check-in/Sharing:** This is the time to mention briefly any major issues or events on your mind that you would like to share.

**Topic: Together / Apart**

With the pandemic shelter-in-place, we have found ourselves in a much smaller circle of physical interaction than most of us normally choose. We may be living alone, with a pet, with housemates, with a partner, with young children or children who have moved back, or with extended family members or friends. For most of us, we are spending far more time at home than we are used to.

For all of us, our usual social interactions are limited. This can be a bigger deal if we are living alone. It is much harder for all of us to build and maintain relationships that have relied on casual interactions, whether that is with co-workers in the hallway, or with friends we see walking a dog, at the gym, chorus, or other activities we have built into our life patterns. In the absence of these casual interactions, almost any interaction must now be intentional.

If we are living with others, spending more hours together than we are used to, we may be dealing with limitations of space and time and patience. With enforced togetherness, and potentially more stresses from jobs, lack of jobs, educating children, dealing with illness, etc. it is much easier to get on each other's nerves. We may be discovering habits of our co-confinees that are challenging. At times we ourselves may be harder for others to live with. We may need to define new patterns and boundaries of time and space and responsibilities.

Most of us have loved ones, whether friends or family, that do not live with us, whether across town or across the world. It is especially difficult in times of illness, sadness and celebration to not be able to be together. Perhaps we can help each other by sharing our struggles as well as creative ways in which we have managed to reach out and feel connected.

“True friends stay with you no matter the distance or time that separates you from them.” – *Lance Reynald*

“How it felt to have the world moving beneath me, a hand gripping mine, knowing if I fell, at least I wouldn't do it alone.” — *Sarah Dessen*

“The trust is the magnet in every relationship, without that you cannot win one's confidence; you will stay out of the circle.” — *Ehsan Sehgal*

“Sometimes it's easier to love people when there is a healthy distance between us.” — *Marianne Williamson*

“One sees qualities at a distance and defects at close range.” — *Victor Hugo*

“Just as we expect others to value our boundaries, it's equally important for us to respect the boundaries of others.” — *Laurie Buchanan*

### **Possible Questions for Discussion:**

- Who and what have you missed due to the pandemic? What substitutes have you found for former activities? As time has passed who and what have you added to your expanded bubble?
- What challenges have you had to deal with either from living alone or living in close quarters with a small set of people? Have you explored any new boundaries, responsibilities or patterns?
- Have you ever found yourself to be hard for others to live with? Have you found anything that helps?
- In your life, what experiences have you had with long distance relationships?
- Have you found yourself reaching out any differently during this time? Have you reconnected with anyone?
- How would you describe your support circle? Where and how did you find its members?
- Could you share any ideas you have added to your post-pandemic todo list in terms of interactions with co-workers, friends or family?

(Group will take a few minutes to consider topic and questions and then share).

**Wrapping Up:** How did you like this topic and session?

### **Closing Words**

“ If we don't have each other, we go crazy with loneliness. When we do, we go crazy with togetherness.” - *Stephen King*