

**Listening**  
UU Community Church of Santa Monica  
Heart to Heart Circles  
February 2016

**Welcome and Explanations**

**Chalice Lighting**

We come together in an attitude of openness—not knowing quite what will happen, yet daring to receive a new idea, a new experience, sustenance for our minds and our hearts.

We come with an attitude of humility, knowing how much we need one another, how alone we can be in the world, how vulnerable if we face life only by ourselves.

We come in the spirit of love, seeking human warmth and fellowship in the hands and faces of those around us.

-Peter Lee Scott

**Sharing Silence** 3 minutes

You may wish to bring your attention to your breath, or move a bit until you have found a comfortable seat. If silence is not a familiar experience to you, three minutes may seem long. If you are accustomed to silence, it may seem short.

**On Our Hearts** 15 minutes

Please share your name and where you live. This is also a time to share wonderful news or a heavy heart - the major highs and lows of your life you'd like everyone to keep in their hearts or in their prayers for you.

**Covenant and Ground Rules**

Our covenant includes a description of how we want to be with each other, ground rules for our time together, and our expectations for members of the group. This covenant is adapted from *Heart to Heart: Fourteen Gatherings for Reflection and Sharing* by Christine Robinson and Alicia Hawkins.

I commit myself:

- to give attendance at meetings a real priority knowing that my presence is important to the group;
- to let the leader know if I will be absent or need to quit;
- to participate with my group in two service projects, one for our church community, and one for the wider community;
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others;
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others;

- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart;
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, problem solving, or giving advice;
- and to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn.

### **Time for Covenant**

Over the year we will spend together, and despite our good intentions, from time to time many of us will be challenged to keep our covenant. Past leaders and participants in the program have found that when each of us understands the covenant, the importance of keeping our covenant, and shares plans for how to call one another back into covenant if that is needed, the experience of Heart to Heart Circles becomes stronger and deeper. This is because our covenant and groundrules create a safe space where participants can share their experiences honestly, without fear of judgment, and go more deeply and personally into their reflections knowing that each member of the group will listen with an open heart. When the covenant is not clearly understood, or when we are not able to call one another back into covenant, the experience of Heart to Heart Circles is less meaningful and members can be hurt or disappointed by the program. This can even result in the dissolution of the group.

What will be easy for you about honoring our covenant and groundrules? What might be difficult?

If you are not sure if you would like to keep our covenant, please “try it on” for three full sessions. If it is still not a fit at the close of your third session, Heart to Heart Circles is probably not a good match for you. There are many other church programs with a more discussion-based format that you may find helpful and enjoyable. Your facilitator can suggest some that might work better for you, such as social activities or book groups.

### **Readings**

If we want to support each other’s inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard.

- Parker J. Palmer, Quaker author and teacher

We have begun to learn about a method of deep listening. As we already know, we have to practice before we can listen deeply. Sometimes we can also translate “deep listening” as compassionate listening, that is, to listen with compassion, or to listen with love. We hear with one aim only; we don’t listen in order to criticize, to blame, to correct the person who is speaking or to condemn the person. We listen with one aim, and that is to relieve the suffering of the one we are listening to.

-Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist teacher

I suspect that the most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give one another is our attention. . . . When people are talking, there’s no need to do anything but receive them.

- Rachel Naomi Remen, author and physician

Why is it so difficult to just listen? Perhaps because we have a hard time believing that it is simply our presence that helps, rather than our thinking and advising. Our open hearts do the healing rather than our carefully chosen words. But most of us haven't experienced this.  
-Christine Robinson and Alicia Hawkins, UU leaders

### **Questions for consideration:**

1. Describe a person in your life now, or in your past, who is a good listener. What were they like? How did you feel around this person?
2. When you were a child, how did your family act around the dinner table? Was there a time for sharing or were there lots of interruptions? What was mealtime like?
3. Some people say there are two kinds of listening: really listening, or waiting for your turn to speak. When is it easy for you to really listen? When is it hard?

**Sharing** 60 minutes

### **Reflecting On Our Time Together**

Please share anything that would otherwise be unsaid as you leave our time together. Do you wish you had shared something more, less, different? How are you feeling as you leave? Feeling words are ok, such as sad, mad, glad, peaceful, powerful, joyful.

### **Closing Words**

We are really alive when we listen to each other, to the silences of each other as well as the words and what lies behind the words.

-Frederick Buechner, author and Presbyterian minister