

Listening
UU Community Church of Santa Monica
Heart to Heart Circles
February 2017

Welcome and Explanations

Welcome! We are so glad you are here! At our first session we know it can take folks a bit of time to get used to parking, finding our space, etc, so there may be a few folks still coming in as we get started. Please take one of the nametags we've prepared for you and join the circle.

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

On Our Hearts is a practice of sharing and listening that invites us into connection with one another by sharing what is really going on for us as we come into the circle. As we get used to this practice, consider how Robinson and Hawkins describe this part of our time together in their book, *Heart to Heart*:

Some weeks you will come to the group with wonderful news or a heavy heart, and it will be important for the group to know what's going on with you. A few minutes are set aside for this kind of sharing. In addition, the leader will let you know about any absent members at this time. This is not meant to be a check-in, where each group member talks about his or her week. It is really only for the major highs and lows, the things you'd like everyone to keep in their hearts or in their prayers for you.

A Moment of Silence

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 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?

Returning group members will notice that we have removed the commitment promising that we will take on two service projects as part of our H2H experience. Over the past few years, we have noticed that these projects had begun to drain

energy from program leaders, rather than allow for deepened connection and a sense of shared responsibility and service. What feelings come up for you when you hear that we will be experimenting this year to not include this commitment?

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.

What is Crosstalk?

Over the years we have found that many people benefit from a bit of clarification regarding “crosstalk.” In our circles, crosstalk is commenting on, questioning or otherwise interrupting someone’s sharing. The idea behind our commitment to “refrain from crosstalk” is to help each individual feel safe when sharing and being able to share thoughts and feelings completely. Often topics have great depth and one can feel vulnerable in revealing one’s self to a group. By eliminating any interruptions, one can feel safer in sharing, not be intimidated and express a in a free-flowing manner a complete train of thought. Not commenting directly on what someone else has chosen to share allows for more openness by each member of the circle.

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?
4. There can be many barriers to listening deeply to "the other side," or feeling deeply listened to by someone from "the other side." Can you describe a time when you were able to listen deeply to a position very different from your own, or when you felt deeply listened to by someone from "the other side"? What made that listening possible, and what did it feel like?

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