

**Mortality: The Practice of Being Alive**  
*Adapted from materials from White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church*  
UU Community Church of Santa Monica  
Heart to Heart Circles  
March 2016

**Welcome and Explanations** 5 minutes

**Chalice Lighting**

[N]one of us ever really walks in another's shoes or knows the innermost rooms of a person's heart. None of us truly knows the lonely places of another's journey or the causes of the lines around another's eyes. Therefore, let us be gentle with one another. Let us listen more than we speak and accept more than we judge. Let our open, outstretched hands reach and touch that we may walk along together for a little while in friendship and in trust.

-- Elizabeth Tarbox

**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 ground rules 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**

To suspect your own mortality is to know the beginning of terror; to learn irrefutably that you are mortal is to know the end of terror.

- Frank Herbert

It is not the end of the physical body that should worry us. Rather, our concern must be to live while we're alive – to release our inner selves from the spiritual death that comes with living behind a facade designed to conform to external definitions of who and what we are.

- Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Getting old is the second-biggest surprise of my life, but the first, by a mile, is our unceasing need for deep attachment and intimate love. We oldies yearn daily and hourly for conversation and a renewed domesticity, for company at the movies or while visiting a museum, for someone close by in the car when coming home at night. This is why we throng Match.com and OkCupid in such numbers — but not just for this, surely. Rowing in Eden (in Emily Dickinson’s words: “Rowing in Eden –/Ah — the sea”) isn’t reserved for the lithe and young, the dating or the hooked-up of the just lavishly married, or even for couples in the middle-aged mixed-doubles semifinals, thank God. No personal confession or revelation impends here, but these feelings in old folks are widely treated like a raunchy secret. The invisibility factor — you’ve had your turn — is back at it again. But I believe that everyone in the world wants to be with someone else tonight, together in the dark, with the sweet warmth of a hip or a foot or a bare expanse of shoulder within reach. Those of us who have lost that, whatever our age, never lose the longing: just look at our faces. If it returns, we seize upon it avidly, stunned and altered again.

- Roger Angell

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.  
Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

-Rumi

**Questions for consideration:**

1. How does awareness of your mortality impact your living today?
2. Is mortality, or speaking about mortality, frightening to you? How do you cope with your fears?
3. How do you balance the demands of everyday life with the desire to live fully?
4. In what ways have you experienced mortality in your own life and relationships?
5. What makes you feel alive?

**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**

#696, Singing the Living Tradition

To live in this world you must be able to do three things:  
To love what is mortal;  
to hold it against your bones knowing your own life depends on it;

And, when the time comes to let it go,  
To let it go.  
- Mary Oliver