

Forgiveness

UU Community Church of Santa Monica
Heart to Heart Groups
September 2015

Welcome and Orientation 10 minutes

This is a time when your facilitator/s introduce themselves and go over housekeeping details such as parking, meeting space, nametags, and confirming your contact information.

Chalice Lighting

Let us open our minds and hearts to the place of quiet,
To the silent prayer for the healing of pain
And the soft, gentle coming of love.

-Composite, *The Mountain*, 2008

Sharing Silence

We open our time together with shared silence for about three minutes. This can be a time to meditate if that is part of your spiritual practice, reflect on your transition from where you have been during the day to where you are now, or to just be. If you are accustomed to silence, three minutes may feel short. If you are not, it may feel long.

On Our Hearts 10 minutes

Covenant 20 minutes

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. Adapted from *Heart to Heart* 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.

Readings

I went around saying for a long time that I am not one of those... who is heavily into forgiveness. But, they say we are not punished for the sin, but by the sin, and I began to feel punished by my unwillingness to forgive. By the time I decided to become one of those who is heavily into forgiveness, it was like trying to become a marathon runner in middle age; everything inside me either recoiled, as from a hot flame, or laughed a little too hysterically. I tried to will myself into forgiving people who had harmed me directly or indirectly over the years—four former Presidents, three relatives, two old boyfriends, and one teacher in a pear tree—it was “The Twelve Days of Christmas” meets *Taxi Driver*. But in the end I could only pretend I had. I decided I was starting off with my sights aimed too high. As C.S. Lewis says in *Mere Christianity*, “If we really want to learn forgiveness, perhaps we had better start with something easier than the Gestapo.”

- Anne Lamott

Aunt Agnes takes it all in stride:
Uncle Einar's boorishness,
Cousin Lilia's need to hide,
Cousin Willoughby's sordid mess
He thinks is a "bohemian life,"
Aunt Alicia's wandering wits,
What Uncle Lewis did to his wife,
The way that Uncle Nahum sits
In his creepy corner and calculates,
Aunt Wilma's plans for sweet revenge,
Cousin Hubert in dire straits,
The inevitable and dreaded change
Coming to young Elizabeth,
Cousin Ellie's hordes of mates,
Uncle Ozzie's fear of death.

She recognizes what we are,
Yet holds us in affection
As steadfast as the morning star,
As if our faults had no connection
With the persons we are within.
She doesn't pretend an ignorance
Of our dark collective sin;
She only believes that circumstance
Has gone against us every one,
That by blind forces we were driven.

We make a painful silent moan
At being so horribly forgiven.

-Fred Chappell (The Strain of Mercy)

Questions for consideration:

1. Describe a time in your life when you have struggled with forgiveness. How does it affect who you are today?
2. Is there an area of your life in which you feel constrained by an old hurt or lingering anger? What would help you grow beyond these constraints?
3. When in your life have you "aimed and missed the mark"? How do you find peace or forgiveness for your own failures and shortcomings?
4. In the Jewish tradition, the ten days between Rosh Hashanah (which begins at sundown on September 13th this year) and Yom Kippur mark a time of self-reflection and seeking forgiveness from any you have wronged in the last year. What role does the practice of seeking or offering forgiveness, or letting go of anger, play in your spiritual life?

Sharing 60 minutes

Reflecting On Our Time Together

Closing Words

Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; Therefore we are saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; Therefore we are saved by faith. Nothing we do, however, virtuous, can be accomplished alone; Therefore, we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own; Therefore, we are saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.

- Reinhold Niebuhr