

Bulletin for Compassion

Business

Chalice Lighting

Light the sacred fire in honor of the sacred one
Who teaches love, compassion and honor
That we may heal the earth and heal each other.

—*Ojibway*

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence

Shared Readings

A deep distress hath humanized my soul.—*Wordsworth*

Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity.—*Pema Chödrön*

It is not that in compassion one cuts oneself off from feeling, only from one's own selfishness, self-centeredness. It's an odd thing, another paradox, this balance of involvement and detachment, and perhaps one should not think about it too self-consciously.—*Madeleine L'Engle*

To care for anyone else enough to make their problems one's own, is ever the beginning of one's real ethical development.—*Felix Adler*

Our task must be to free ourselves . . . by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty.—*Albert Einstein*

When we come into contact with the other person, our thoughts and actions should express our mind of compassion, even if that person says and does things that are not easy to accept. We practice in this way until we see clearly that our love is not contingent upon the other person being lovable.—*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Until he extends his circle of compassion to include all living things, man will not himself find peace.—*Albert Schweitzer*

Compassion is not sentiment but is making justice and doing works of mercy. Compassion is not a moral commandment but a flow and overflow of the fullest human and divine energies.
—*Matthew Fox*

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round I

Share a word or phrase that describes an emotion you experience when giving or receiving compassion.

Round II

Using insights you gained from doing the preparation material, talk about your experience with compassion: when you have received it, when you have given it, and when you have withheld it.

Round III

As time allows share additional thoughts or reflect on what others have shared.

Closing Words

We can do no great things; only small things with great love.—*Mother Teresa*

Song

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, 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 do the reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time.
- 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, or giving advice.
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn.

Leader's Notes for Compassion

Business

Chalice Lighting

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin.

Sharing of Joys and Concerns (about 2 min. per person)

Silence (3 min.)

Shared Readings

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening During your rounds of deep sharing/deep listening, pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure all get to share at least once.

Round I (about 2 min. per person)

Share a word or phrase that describes an emotion you experience when giving or receiving compassion.

Round II (about 5 min. per person)

Using insights you gained from doing the preparation material, talk about your experience with compassion: when you have received it, when you have given it, and when you have withheld it.

Round III (about 2 min. per person)

As time allows, share additional thoughts or reflect on what others have shared.

Closing Words

We can do no great things; only small things with great love.—*Mother Teresa*

Song

Preparation for Compassion

The teachings of the world's religions challenge us to act with compassion toward our fellow human beings. But just what is it? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines compassion as the sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it. Poets, theologians, and philosophers have also tried to capture its meaning.

Compassion is the keen awareness of the interdependence of all things.—*Thomas Merton*

You may call God love, you may call God goodness. But the best name for God is compassion.—*Meister Eckhart*

Compassion is sometimes the fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too.—*Frederick Buechner*

The dew of compassion is a tear.—*Lord Byron*

Perhaps compassion is better felt by the heart than defined by the head as noted by Thomas Aquinas, "I would rather feel compassion than know the meaning of it."

Although compassion is valued by people of faith, we often find obstacles to its practice. If we are not aware of our own pain and brokenness, we may end up feeling pity instead of compassion when confronted with another's pain. On the other hand, if we are overpowered by our own problems, we may not be able to open our hearts to others. We may be unable or unwilling to feel compassion towards those who have wounded us. We also can be so overwhelmed by all the suffering in the world and our inability to alleviate most of it that we react with feelings of hopelessness, cynicism, or apathy. Yet even though our compassion is imperfect, it enriches both our lives and the lives of those we meet.

Below are some thoughts to help you ponder the role of compassion throughout your life.

Detachment and involvement . . . The link between them is compassion. . . . Compassion means to suffer with, but it doesn't mean to get lost in the suffering, so that it becomes exclusively one's own. I tend to do this, to replace the person for whom I am feeling compassion with myself.—*Madeleine L'Engle*

Do not believe that he who seeks to comfort you now lives untroubled among the simple and quiet words that sometimes do you good. His life has much difficulty and sadness and remains far behind yours. Were it otherwise he would never have been able to find those words.—*Rainer Maria Rilke*

It is not how much we do, but how much love we put in the doing.
It is not how much we give, but how much love we put in the giving.—*Mother Teresa*

. . . we need to increase the scope of our compassion until it embraces all living beings without exception, just as a loving mother feels compassion for all her children irrespective of whether they are behaving well or badly.—*Geshe Kelsang Gyatso*

I feel the capacity to care is the thing which gives life its deepest significance.—*Pablo Casals*

The only way to learn compassion is through our own broken hearts; we have to back up and pass through our own pain.—*Matthew Fox*

The only reason that we don't open our hearts and minds to other people is that they trigger confusion in us that we don't feel brave enough or sane enough to deal with. To the degree that we look clearly and compassionately at ourselves, we feel confident and fearless about looking into someone else's eyes.—*Pema Chodron*

Compassion automatically invites you to relate with people because you no longer regard people as a drain on your energy.—*Chögyam Trungpa*

True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it understands that an edifice that produces beggars needs restructuring.—*Martin Luther King Jr.*

A man can do only what a man can do. But if he does that each day he can sleep at night and do it again the next day.—*Albert Schweitzer*

I wonder whether you realize a deep, great fact. That souls, all human souls, are interconnected that we can not only pray for each other but suffer for each other. Nothing is more real than this interconnection, this precious power put by God into the very heart of our infirmities.
—*Baron von Hugel*

Questions to Ponder

There are many questions offered below. Choose those that have the most meaning for you.

1. Think of times when you have *given* compassion. How did they affect you as a person? How did they affect your relationship with the other person?
2. Think of times when you have *received* compassion. How did they affect you as a person? How did they affect your relationship with the other person?
3. How have your own life experiences affected your ability to be compassionate?
4. Do you find it desirable or even possible to extend compassion to people you do not like or to those who have harmed you? Think of a situation in which you gave or withheld compassion from such a person.
5. How do you cope with the limits of your compassion in relation to all of the suffering in the world?
6. How content are you with the amount of compassion you give and receive? Describe any changes that you might make in how you live your life with compassion.