"Thank You for Your Loving Hands"

Thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart, your loving ways—
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.
And if you ever doubt yourself, remember us, who love you well—
We know all the gifts you bring into the world each day.
So thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart, your loving ways,
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.

—by Judy Fjell and Lisa Bregger

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent, and to come to the group one last time and say good-bye if I need to quit
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- 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 not tell other people's stories
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn

Covenant Groups

Endings

Endings

Chalice Lighting

Spirit of life and love,
We have come together
In search of understanding,
In search of community.
We have come in search of hope and healing.
This has been a place
Not only of searching, but of discovery . . .
A place not only of learning, but of wisdom . . .
A place not only of meeting, but of connection . ..
We honor this circle of love, ever expanding, ever growing.
—*adapted, Sue Ayer*

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive at where we started
And know the place for the first time.
—*T. S. Eliot*

Endings are a catharsis. They give meaning to what comes before, and change us from the way we were.
—*Steven Winn*

Learning to live is learning to let go.
—*Sogyal Rinpoche*

People tend to be uncomfortable with endings, because every ending is a little death. That's why in many languages, the word for "goodbye" means "see you again." Whenever an experience comes to an end—a gathering of friends, a vacation, your children leaving home—you die a little death.
—*Eckhart Tolle*

The things that matter most in our lives are not fantastic or grand. They are the moments when we touch one another, when we are there in the most attentive or caring way. This simple and profound intimacy is the love that we all long for.
—*Jack Kornfield*

… 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*

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening

Round 1: Share a phrase or sentence from the readings.
Round 2: Share stories, feelings, and experiences of endings in response to the homework about endings in your life.
Round 3: Take a moment for everyone to say one thing that they will remember from participating in the group.

Closing Activity

Closing Words

Here we finalize the venture we began together in the fall
We have opened our hearts by
Listening and sharing deeply from our hearts.
We have been patient with each other
And cheered one another.
We have celebrated and endured our transitions.
We have known joy in our exploring,
Energy in our quest,
Humor for our differences,
And compassion in our sufferings,
Always with a common caring that has held us
In our journey together.
—*adapted, Karen Lewis*

Closing Song

"Thank You for Your Loving Hands"

Homework: Endings

This session represents the last session for your covenant group as it currently is. Our lives are full of beginnings and endings. We will spend some time looking at the ending of this covenant, along with other endings, with awareness, reflection, and appreciation.

> Our time together will be a chapter in the stories of our lives.
> —*Danita Nolan*

> Beginnings and endings go together. We would like to imagine that our lives are a series of only beginnings, but the fact of the matter is that nothing begins without an attendant ending, and there are no gains in our lives that do not include losses.
> —*Christine Robinson*

> My friend, let's not think of tomorrow, but let's enjoy this fleeting moment of life.
> —*Omar Khayyam*

> What is born will die,
> What has been gathered will be dispersed,
> What has been accumulated will be exhausted,
> What has been built up will collapse,
> And what has been high will be brought low.
> —*Buddha*

> Appreciation can give a meaning to endings.
> —*Patrick Dawson*

> Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh invented the word "interbeing" to describe sacred time. In every human experience, you cannot just *be* by yourself alone. You have to inter-be, to be in relationship with others or other things. Covenant groups are concentrated experiences of inter-being. We each bring our separate lives to create a life together.
> —*Adapted from Rev. Thandeka*

> What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.
> —*T. S. Eliot*

Questions to Ponder

Endings in your life:

- Do you remember a good-bye from your childhood? Who or what were you leaving?
- Think of an ending that has occurred more recently in your life, and then consider:
  - The transition that resulted for you after the ending
  - What you learned from this ending and transition that has been (or might be) useful in responding to future endings

Ending of our group:

- What is something you appreciate about this group as it has been?
- What are the insights and gifts of wisdom you've found during the year? In yourself? From the others in your covenant group?
- As a result of this group, how have you changed?

Leader's Guide: Endings

Preparation

Note: You'll be provided with origami stars and markers at a facilitator's meeting. Bring them to the session.

Chalice Lighting (2 min)

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

> Spirit of life and love,
> We have come together
> In search of understanding,
> In search of community.
> We have come in search of hope and healing.
> This has been a place
> Not only of searching, but of discovery . . .
> A place not only of learning, but of wisdom . . .
> A place not only of meeting, but of connection . ..
> We honor this circle of love, ever expanding, ever growing.
> —*Adapted, Sue Ayer*

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows (10 min)

Ask group members to tell in one or two sentences: "How you are today?" Share information about absent members.

Silence (3 min)

Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence.

Shared Readings (5 min)

Go around your group, letting each person in turn read from Shared Readings found in the bulletin until all readings are finished.

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (60 min)

Do your rounds of deep sharing/deep listening. Pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure all have an equal chance to share.

Round 1 (10 min): Share a phrase or sentence from the bulletin (chalice lighting and readings) that jumps out to them as they think about endings. Go around the circle with each person reading their phrase/sentence.

Round 2 (35 min): Share stories, feelings, and experiences of endings in response to the homework about endings in your life.

Round 3 (10 min): Take a moment for everyone to say one thing that they will remember from participating in this group.

Closing Activity (10 min)

Pass out stars and pens around the circle. Ask everyone to put his or her name on a star. Have each member write a word or two that characterizes the person named on that star, and then pass the star on to the next person. Everyone will end up with six or seven descriptive words or phrases on his or her star.

When all have finished and everyone has their star, read this quote:

> The only legacy we leave is the light that shines from our life.
> —*Christine Robinson*

Then ask each person in the group to share his or her star, their legacy, by reading the words on their stars in this way: "This is my star; I am [*loving, deep, curious, caring, etc].*" Go first to model the process.

Closing Words (1 min)

Here we finalize the venture we began together in the fall
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Listening and sharing deeply from our hearts.
We have been patient with each other
And cheered one another.
We have celebrated and endured our transitions.
We have known joy in our exploring,
Energy in our quest,
Humor for our differences,
And compassion in our sufferings,
Always with a common caring that has held us
In our journey together.
—*Adapted, Karen Lewis*

Closing Song (1 min)

"Thank You for Your Loving Hands"