The Individual In Community

Chalice Lighting

Life is a gift for which we are grateful.
We gather in community to celebrate the glories
And the mysteries of this great gift.

Marjorie Montgomery

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Writing Exercise

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round I What were your counts for the exercise?

Round II Did the writing exercise surprise you or provide any insight? Also respond to homework questions as you feel moved.

Round III A more general discussion, as time allows.

Closing Words

Song Go Now in Peace or Circle Round for Freedom

Circle 'round for freedom, circle 'round for peace,
For all of us imprisoned, circle for release,
Circle for the planet, circle for each soul,
For the children of our children,
Keep the circle whole.

Group Business

Pass out homework for next session.

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

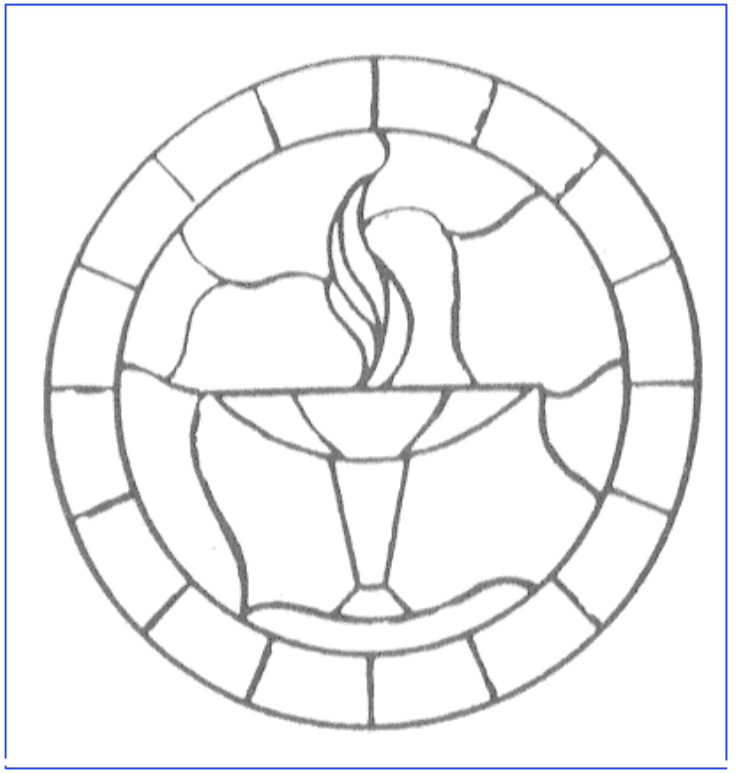
Covenant Groups

Individual in Community

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.
- 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.



Leader's Notes for The Individual In Community

Preparations or any special instructions

Read through the Writing Exercise to familiarize yourself with it. Round I is a bit different this time. It will be more writing than talking, so bring a pencil or pen for everyone. Pass them out before the session starts.

"Circle Round For Freedom" #155 in "Singing the Living Tradition" fits the theme better than "Go Now In Peace", if you want some adventure in the closing song. A copy of that song is included for your convenience at the end of this document.

As people come in ask one person to do the Chalice Lighting.

Chalice Lighting: (2 min)

Life is a gift for which we are grateful.
We gather in community to celebrate the glories
And the mysteries of this great gift.

Marjorie Montgomery

Sharing of Joys and Concerns: (10 min)

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

Silence: (3 min)

Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence.

Writing Exercise: (8 min)

Part 1: Make sure everyone has a pencil or pen. Ask them to write 10-15 sentences that complete the statement "I am…" They shouldn't think too hard about this, just write what comes to mind right away. Assure them we won't be sharing the answers, so they don't need to edit them. Allow about 4 minutes.

Part 2: When time's up, have everyone stop writing and count up how many of their statements described themselves as individuals ("I am happy", "I am a dentist"), and how many described themselves in relationships or groups ("I am an American", "I am the oldest of three boys"). In Round I everyone will tell their count, and they can respond more fully in Round II if they want.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening:

Round I (3 min)

What were your counts for the exercise?

Round II (40 min)

Did the writing exercise surprise you or provide any insight into how you view yourself? Also respond to homework questions as you feel moved.

Round III (15 min)

A more general discussion, as time allows.

Closing Words: (5 min)

Go your ways,
Knowing not the answers to all things,
Yet seeking always the answer
To one more thing than you know.

John Brigham

Or

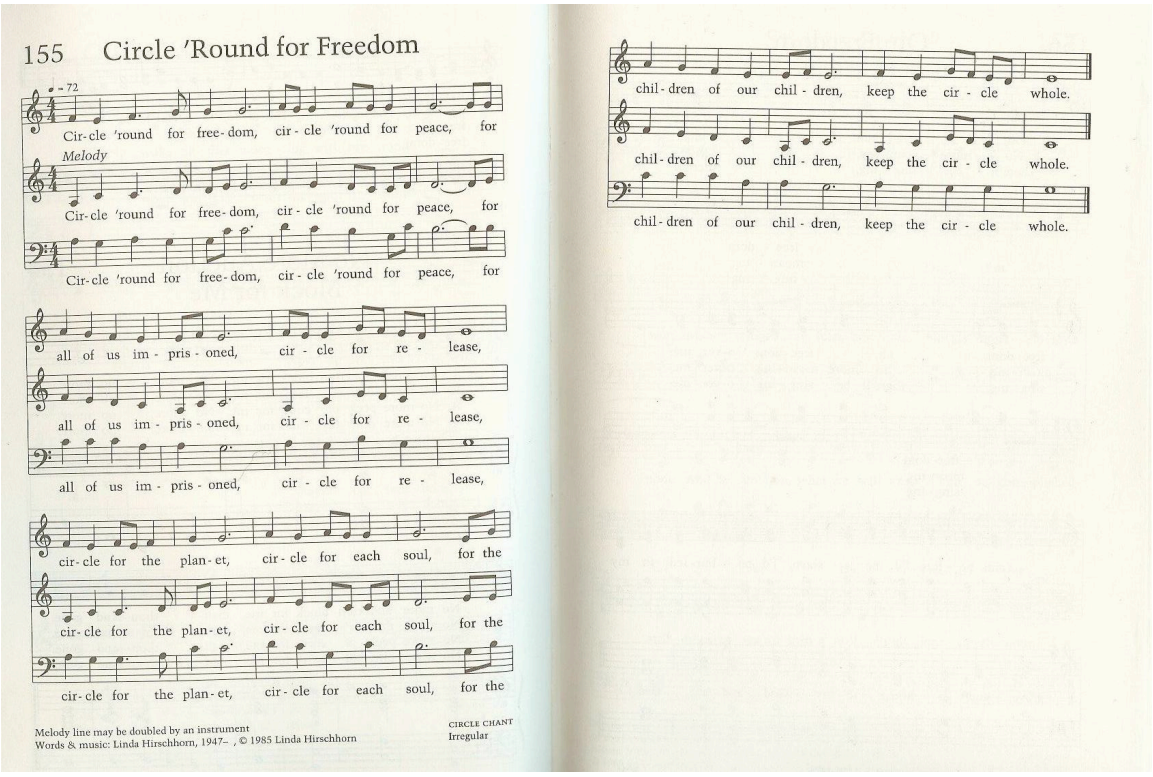
Let us seek to remember the
Wholeness of our lives,
The weaving of light and shadow
In this great and astonishing
Dance in which we move.

Kathleen McTugue

Sing: Go Now in Peace or Circle Round for Freedom (2 min)

Group Business: (5 min)

Pass out Q and Q (homework) for next time.



The Individual In Community

Every culture, and every person within that culture, must decide how much importance to give to the individual and how much to the community

…. There is a natural tension between what is good for the individual versus what is good for the community. American culture tends to come down on the side of the individual. Nature itself, however, seems to place the good of the community above the well-being of the individual. A bee, without hesitation, will sting anyone threatening the hive, sacrificing its individual life in the process.

…Hinduism and, springing from it, Buddhism… emphasize community, the oneness of all things. The ultimate goal of existence is Nirvana, or liberation from the individual self. For the Hindu, in heaven the individual soul loses its unique identity, is dissolved like a drop into the great ocean of life. How foreign this is for most Americans. The Judeo-Christian-Muslim world view, while cherishing the community, also affirms the lasting value of the individual.

Ronald Stanley

Community is always poised between two poles: solitude and togetherness. Without togetherness community disperses; without solitude community collapses into a mass, a crowd. But solitude and togetherness are not mutually antagonistic; on the contrary, they make each other possible.

Solitude without togetherness deteriorates into loneliness. One needs strong roots in togetherness to be solitary rather than lonely when one is alone. Aloneness is neutral; loneliness is aloneness which is cut off from togetherness; solitude is aloneness supported by togetherness, blessed solitude.

Togetherness without solitude is not truly togetherness, but rather side-by-sideness. To live merely side by side is alienation. We need time and space to be alone, to find ourselves in solitude, before we can give ourselves to one another in true togetherness. A particular balance between solitude and togetherness will characterize a particular community. But by "balance" we mean more than the ratio between time spent alone and time spent with one another; we mean an inner relatedness of solitude and togetherness which makes each of them what it is in a given case.

On one end of the spectrum lies a type of community in which togetherness is the goal that is sought above all: a particularly close-knit family, for example. We may call this type togetherness-community. On the other end of the spectrum lies a community totally oriented towards solitude, for instance, a community of hermits. Let us call this type solitude-community. Since in either case both solitude and togetherness are essential for true community, the difference is one of emphasis.

The spectrum is continuous, but the distinction is clear; in togetherness-community, togetherness is the measure of solitude; the members have a right and a duty to get as much solitude as they need for deep and strong togetherness. In solitude-community, solitude is the measure of togetherness; here the members have a right and a duty to get as much togetherness as each one needs to support and enrich solitude.

A human being cannot survive without community. Nor can one be truly happy unless one finds the particular type of community that will fulfill one's needs for solitude and togetherness.

Brother David Steindl-Rast

Questions to Ponder

1. What is a time in your life when you have you felt supported and enriched in a community? What is a time in your life that a community oppressed or alienated you? What made the difference?

2. David Steindl-Rast describes a spectrum from a close-knit family to a community of hermits. Where do you think you would fit most comfortably on that spectrum?

3. How do you feel about the community/individual balance in your life now? Do you need more community and togetherness, more autonomy and solitude, both, or is the balance about right?