

Facilitator Notes for Listening

Preparation for the first meeting

- When you sent the Welcome Email, you sent Zoom meeting info and attached the Preparation. The Zoom info included the link for the meeting and the meeting ID / password. You asked whether anyone was joining by phone. You also asked whether people could print, since many find a printed copy easier to use at the Gathering.
- Several days before the meeting, email again and use the Reminder and Gathering Email. In that email, you attach the Gathering to make sure people have it for the actual meeting. That email also repeats the Zoom info for the meeting.
- In that same Reminder and Gathering email, you ask people to make sure that they have a copy of the Gathering – preferably a printed copy -- that they can use for the meeting.
- Have the roster with participants' names, phone numbers, and email addresses handy.
- Bring a chime or bell to end the meeting.
- Have a chalice or candle ready to light. It does not have to be visible during the meeting.

As participants join the meeting

- Welcome each person as they join.
- Check that they are unmuted and have video if video is possible for them.
- Check each person's volume. Make sure that you can hear them and they can hear you.
- Ask each person to check the name in their picture box. If their preferred name is different from the name in their picture box, choose Rename from "... " to change the name. This is their "name tag." You might want to use just first names to make them easier to read.
- Make sure that everyone has a copy of the Gathering available. They might need to find it.

The Gathering

Chalice Lighting *If you're lighting a chalice / candle, then ask someone else to read.*

We light this chalice to shine on our time together. In its light we celebrate the relationships and understanding we are creating in this place and time. May our sharing be deep.

Introductions *(15 minutes)*

Explain that members should indicate they want to speak by raising their actual hand, not the Zoom "raise hand." We usually have a check-in time here. Today we are using this time to introduce ourselves briefly. Let's take a minute or two each to tell a little about ourselves and why we were drawn to a covenant group. *Go first to model. Then ask each person by name to speak one by one. At the end, you might ask again to make sure that everyone has spoken.*

I grew up in ...

I have been ... (teacher, parent, engineer, artist, caregiver, salesperson ...)

I am interested in ... (gardening, reading, social justice, painting, ...)

My family or support system ... (partner, children, friends ...)

In this covenant group I hope ...

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support (2 minutes)

Business (15 minutes)

Usually business is handled briefly at the end of the meeting. Today is longer since we're beginning.

Basics

- Tell everyone how glad you are that they are in the group and how much you're looking forward to getting to know them.
- Each gathering will last an hour and a half to two hours and will be centered on a particular topic. Today's topic is Listening.
- We will meet for fourteen gatherings.
- Ask participants to let you know if they need to miss or come late to a meeting.
- Tell them that you will email the materials and the Zoom meeting info before each meeting. Ask whether anyone would like the copies printed and mailed (USPS) instead.
- Let them know that materials are also available on the church website. You can show people how to access the materials later.

Being Together in this Group

The facilitator leads a brief discussion on inclusion.

- Ask people to raise their hand if they know anyone else in the group. Ask those people to say briefly how they know other people.
- Say that in a covenant group, we try to make everyone feel included. That is why we don't reference our past or current social connections to people in the group. Other people might feel left out. Ask whether people have questions.
- Say that later you will ask whether it is ok for people to share emails and phone numbers.

Zoom Basics

- Ask for people to raise hands if they have used Zoom before. Then ask for another show of hands if they have used it in a group meeting, not just at church. You can use that information to help people who might need it the most.
- Teach people how to change between Speaker View and Gallery View.
- Teach people how to mute and unmute themselves. Mention that it can be hard to keep track of muting and unmuting, however. Generally, people should try to reduce extraneous noise. Barking dogs or even outdoor birdsong can cause Zoom to shift its "focus" and make it harder for people to pay attention to the speaker.
- Teach people how to Rename themselves in their picture to make a "name tag."
- If you plan to use Chat (like for the Words of the Day), teach people about Chat, although it is not used in this session.

Zoom Group Basics

In covenant groups there are several opportunities for each person to speak in turn. For example, we share joys and concerns and we read the Shared Readings. If we were sitting together, we would speak in a natural order going around the circle. In Zoom, however, we can't do this, because Zoom doesn't always keep people in a stable order, even in Gallery View. We wish it did.

There are a few ways to make sure everyone gets to speak. One way is “facilitator asks,” where the facilitator calls on one person at a time. I used this method in our Introductions. Sometimes I might ask people to raise their hands and then call on them one by one. Of course, “raise hands” doesn’t work for members who aren’t using video.

Another approach is “members chain.” One group member speaks, and then asks another group member if they would like to speak next. Note that each member’s picture has their “name tag,” so this method works even if people don’t know everyone yet. In fact, it’s a good way to learn names.

It can be hard to keep track of who has spoken in a video meeting, so people should speak up if they somehow get missed. The facilitator can also ask whether everyone has had a turn.

During some portions of the meeting, people can speak more freely without taking turns. And as your group gets to know each other, you will probably find that speaking happens more casually.

The Covenant

We’re going to read our Covenant and discuss it. Everyone should be unmuted so that we can discuss and agree. I’m going to read the first item, and we’ll discuss it and ask everyone to agree. Then I’ll continue asking people to read the next item.

Check that everyone is unmuted and help them if necessary. Read the first item yourself and explain or elaborate if needed. Ask whether there are any comments or problems. Then ask whether everyone can everyone agree on this item. Continue this pattern with every Covenant item, asking a different member to read each time.

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to let the facilitator know if I will be absent or need to quit
- to share responsibility for good process by watching how much time I take to speak, noticing what is going on for others, and considering problems if they occur
- 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, giving advice, or advocating a specific view
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn and to stay on the “I-message.”

Shared Readings

Now we have our shared readings. We’re going to use the “members chain” method. I’ll start, and then I’ll ask someone to go next. Then that person speaks and asks another person. Remember that the person’s name is with their picture. *Make sure everyone has an opportunity to read.*

The human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard. *Parker J. Palmer*

You will never be able to escape from your heart. So it’s better to listen to what it has to say.
Paulo Coelho

When we are committed to doing the work of love we listen even when it hurts. *bell hooks*

Autism makes you listen louder. It makes you pay attention on an emotional level as well as an intellectual level. *Jace King*

The greatest gift we can give another is our presence. *Thich Nhat Hanh*

Listen to yourself and in that quietude you might hear the voice of God. *Maya Angelou*

A woman once described a friend of hers as being such a keen listener that even the trees leaned toward her, as if they were speaking their innermost secrets into her listening ears. *Linda Hogan*

Love is the quality of attention we pay to things. *J.D. McClatchy*

There is a you telling yourself a different story of you. Listen to her. *Paidraig O'Tuama*

Most people need a few experiences of simply being listened to before they can really believe that just listening is enough. In time, we discover that to be listened to is a way of being loved, and that listening is a way of being loving. *Christine Robinson*

Introducing Deep Sharing and Deep Listening

Read or explain this: You've read the preparation material, so you've been thinking about "deep listening." Deep sharing and deep listening make up the core of a covenant group. It is a unique way of sharing and listening, so we want to spend a few minutes getting acquainted with this process.

Ask three volunteers to raise their hands. Identify the volunteers and ask them to be ready to read the paragraphs below. After each, explain or elaborate as needed. Then call on the next volunteer.

Rounds of Sharing. There are two rounds of sharing. During each round, one person speaks at a time. Speakers share from the heart as deeply as they are willing, reflecting on the topic and their feelings, thoughts, and experiences. The job of listeners is to listen deeply, keeping their hearts open.

Round 1. Each person in the group takes about five minutes to reflect aloud on the topic and the preparation materials. They speak without interruption. The facilitator starts. Everyone who wants to speak gets one turn, in any order they choose. Anyone may pass. As each person finishes speaking, there are a few breaths of silence. Then the next person speaks. People can speak in any order.

Round 2. This is an opportunity to share additional reflections and thoughts about what others have shared. Speakers still focus on their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences and remain mindful not to judge another's sharing, give advice, or advocate a position. Everyone who wants to speak gets a turn, and everyone is mindful of time so that each person has an opportunity to speak.

Read or explain: Some participants may feel a little uncomfortable with the lack of response after someone has shared. Be assured that this silence during and after the sharing can become a powerful, sacred time for the group. One facilitator explained it this way, "When listeners have been allowed into the recesses of the speaker's life, there is a rich intimacy. Silence seems to be the best response." Give yourself a few gatherings to get used to this new way of listening and sharing.

So that each person has an equal opportunity to share, the facilitator keeps an eye on the time. The facilitator will signal when the time is almost up. The signal could be a small wave.

Deep Listening and Sharing (60 minutes)

Round 1. Now we'll share reflections on listening and the preparation materials.

Note the time available for each person. Ask people to remain silent or mute themselves while the speaker is sharing. Say that during this round we don't go in a certain order. People raise a hand when they are ready.

Go first to model sharing. When you are finished, ask people to raise their hand if they are ready. Call on someone with a raised hand. You may need to assist with un-muting.

Round 2. As time allows, share additional thoughts or reflect on what others have shared.

If there is time for Round 2, note how much is available. You might ask everyone to unmute to allow for freer exchange and note that anyone can speak, just be respectful of others. Go first as a model for the group.

Closing Circle

Now we will go around the circle. Each person says a word or two, maybe a sentence, about what you are taking away from the session or how you are feeling. *All unmuted might work well here, since the comments are brief. The facilitator starts. the facilitator can either call on people or ask them to "chain."*

Extinguishing the Chalice *Read it yourself or ask for a volunteer.*

We extinguish this flame and we remember the warmth of our community, the light of our wisdom, the generosity of our sharing. We keep these in our heart until we meet again.

Bell or Chime

Strike the chime or ring the bell to end the session.

Announcements *Announce Cultivating Relationships as the topic for next time and say that you will email the Preparation and meeting info. Say that the covenant group has ended and note the "Leave Meeting" choice on people's screens. Say that you can talk with anyone who has concerns about covenant groups or Zoom basics.*