Preparation for Gratitude

The Oxford English Dictionary online defines gratitude as "the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness." Gratitude is often a feeling of joy inspired by a specific life experience.

Science has found that gratitude has many benefits. Positive psychology blogger Amit Amin summarizes studies of gratitude's benefits in five categories: personality, health, emotional, social, and career. They include the following:

- Gratitude makes strengthens positive emotions and makes us happier by triggering positive feedback loops
- Gratitude makes people like us by helping to deepen relationships
- Gratitude makes us healthier – lowering blood pressure, decreasing pain, increasing energy and exercise time, improving sleep

Adopting a practice of gratitude can include experiencing joyful moments in our lives to their fullest and recalling them later with thankfulness; recording experiences in a gratitude journal; and sharing those experiences with others.

While an "attitude of gratitude" provides many scientifically confirmed benefits, it can be challenging through not only the uncertainty of the COVID pandemic, but also through times of transition, conflict or change, on a personal level or a wider community, regional or global level.

As 2020-2021 brought an increased awareness of our personal health and that of our planet, it is helpful to be able to look for a "silver lining" through all we are learning through experience. This means that a larger perspective than personal circumstances is beneficial. What may be considered "ordinary" life experiences taken for granted can become "extraordinary" and worthy of gratitude.

The global health emergency of the pandemic, while limiting personal freedom, also caused many individuals to reprioritize aspects of their lives in ways that will continue when the health threat has passed. In reflecting on this shared experience of sickness and death, isolation, and uncertainty, we can also balance these memories by gratitude for time with loved ones despite our differences, and our efforts to keep all of us safe and well the best we can.

The immediacy of addressing global climate change has also elevated the importance of gratitude for the conveniences/necessities of shelter, electricity, and water that we often take for granted, while many have been deprived of these as wildfires and storms have forever changed many regions.

While the whole of our life experiences contains joy and sorrow, ups and downs, reflecting on lessons learned from a wider perspective may help initiate feelings of gratitude for the often-overlooked joys of daily living.

We are all more blind to what we have than to what we have not. *Audre Lorde*

There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground. *Rumi*

A thankful person is thankful under all circumstances. A complaining soul complains even if he lives in paradise. *Baha'u'llah*

Gratitude is when memory is stored in the heart and not in the mind. *Lionel Hampton*

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. *Melody Beattie*

Live a life full of humility, gratitude, intellectual curiosity, and never stop learning.
GZA – rapper, songwriter, and actor, also known as "The Genius"

When I rise up / let me rise up joyful like a bird.
When I fall / let me fall without regret like a leaf.
Wendell Berry

When you arise in the morning give thanks for the food and for the joy of living. If you see no reason for giving thanks, the fault lies only in yourself.
Attributed to Tecumseh and also to some Wabasha Native leaders

When eating fruit, remember the one who planted the tree. *Vietnamese proverb*

Questions to Ponder

1. Think of an experience where you felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude. Relive that experience and feeling.

2. While gratitude is described as a feeling, how do you express it in action – alone or with others?

3. Reflect on an experience related to gratitude that created an emotional shift in you and made you feel connected to something larger than yourself.

4. What have you learned about yourself from the practice of gratitude and how it affects your life? Are you able to remember difficult times with gratitude for lessons learned?

5. In a society that emphasizes "more, more, more," how do you feel grateful for all you have?

6. Is a feeling of gratitude easier for you at the time of an experience or afterwards in a moment or time of reflection? What changes affect these differences in perspective?

Ending of our group

7. What is something you appreciate about this group as it has been?

8. What are the insights and gifts of wisdom you've found during the year? In yourself? From the others in your covenant group?

9. As a result of this group, how have you changed, even in a small way?

Words of the Day

Before the Gathering, reflect on a specific experience in the recent past for which you are grateful. One example or several ideas are welcome. The Words of the Day sentence is "I am grateful for …"

In addition, be prepared to name a characteristic or quality you admire for each member of the group. Your facilitator may contact you with information about sharing these phrases.