

Covenant Group First Meeting – January 2012

Topic: Getting Started

[This topic has three parts: I) Introducing Covenant Groups; Part II: a short session to be handed out separately when ready, and Part III: Our Covenant Group Relationship. These activities may take as long as needed.]

Light the Chalice

Check-In (Welcome; Introductions)

Part I: Introducing Covenant Groups

1) A Brief Introduction to Covenant Groups

a) General Philosophy

A place for spiritual exploration and search for meaning

A place to develop deeper relationships with others

A place to explore our spirit and faith

A context in which to speak to our concerns with the expectation that our views will be heard and respected

A safe setting in which there can be consideration of issues

b) How Covenant Groups Work *[review briefly]*

Start/end on time at this location

Chalice lighting

Facilitator hands out the Topic

Check-ins (what do you need to leave behind to get centered?)

Topic Introduction

Questions or Activity

Sharing (how we will do this will be discussed in Part III)

Closing Words

Likes and Wishes (What did you like? Wish you could have changed?)

Extinguishing the Chalice

The Empty Chair (We keep an empty chair to symbolize those not yet reached who need us)

c) What a covenant group is not

A social club

A therapy group

A singles group

2) The Role of the Facilitator

Leads the meeting of the group

Makes copies and disburses Topics at the meeting

Keeps the covenant

Calls us back to our covenant whenever s/he believes we have strayed

Part II: Our First Topic: Sharing Our Eternal Truths

Opening Words:

We are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.

Thomas Jefferson, Letter to William Roscoe

Topic Introduction:

An eternal truth is one based on that which we have believed throughout our lives, and that we believe will always be true. The Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you,” is an example. Sharing these truths with trusted others helps us to “test” our visions against reality, thereby confirming them or offering reasons to revise them. Having done so, we achieve greater self-awareness, a deeper sense of intimacy, and a stronger connection with those around us.

Sharing/Deep Listening: (about which we share our personal thoughts and feelings):

- **What is one belief you have always held?**
- **In what ways do you share your own personal growth?**
- **What have been the costs, if any, in not sharing with others?**

Discussion:

Likes and Wishes (What did you like? Wish could have been different?)

Closing Words:

I think that, as life is action and passion, it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time at peril of being judged not to have lived.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Memorial Day Address

Part III: Our Covenant Group Relationship

As we begin a new season of covenant groups, we have an opportunity to reflect on our purpose and the methods we can employ to achieve our goals of fostering spiritual growth and authentic relationships. Our sharing never involves efforts to persuade or dissuade one another. Instead each person speaks from his or her own center to the center of the circle, where our exploration can take us to a deeper level in weaving a tapestry of truth.

Questions for group discussion:

A. Showing Respect

1. When and where do we wish to hold our gatherings? Do we agree to arrive at the stated time? How early can we come? How will we handle latecomers?
2. How will we create a safe, respectful space for everyone to participate?
3. How will we support each other to explore his/her own experiences and ideas *more deeply*?

4. How do we demonstrate that we are truly listening?
5. How will we assure each other confidentiality about our conversations?
6. Is it OK to stay and talk with each other after the meeting? For how long?
7. What do we do if we cannot be here?

B. Sharing Time

8. What is our understanding of the Check-in? How long should each person take? Do we agree to refrain from commenting on Check-Ins?
9. Who reads the Topic Introduction? Will we answer each question or all the questions at once?
10. What kinds of questions and comments during sharing are appropriate?
11. To what extent are we expected to share? What if some do not?
12. How acceptable would it be to share personal stories, emotionally charged events, beliefs, values, or faith?
13. To what extent shall we discuss church, local and world issues?
14. Can participants ask for feedback? If so, how can we respond?
15. How should we share our “wishes”?

C. Development of the Covenant

A covenant is a set of relational ground rules about how we want to treat each other. It creates a safe environment and enables a small group to build friendships and share spiritual exploration. Typical topics: time management, commitment, respectful listening, confidentiality, and speaking from one’s own experience. Here are a few examples of covenants made by other groups:

We will come to meetings on time

We will start and end on time

We will take turns lighting our chalice

We will listen with respect without trying to solve each other’s problems

We will encourage one another

We will keep confidential what we hear at our meetings

We will speak from personal experience

What do WE want in our covenant? (Discussion, Creation of covenant)

[In Meeting #2, the Facilitator distributes copies of the final covenant.]

Extinguish the Chalice