

Secrets--- UUFVB Covenant Groups--- July 2018

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community, and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Centering: Find stillness, hold stillness, let this moment of silence ease your soul.

Opening Reading

A secret is any piece of information that is intentionally hidden from someone else. There are three main reasons why an individual or an organization would want to keep a secret. One is that there is a strategic advantage to having information that others don't have. The second is that the information would have negative consequences for the secret holder if it were more widely known. The third is that the information would have negative consequences for *other* individuals or groups if they found out about it.

Not all secrets are bad. For example, a surprise party or gift shouldn't be spoiled by early revelations. Not all truths need to be shared with everyone—or anyone—to maintain a healthy and happy life. How do we tell what kinds of secrets we can keep, and the ones we should not? Ask this question: does the secret allow us to behave in a way that causes harm to ourselves or others? If so, chances are the secret is not worth keeping.

Topic Exploration A: Keeping Secrets Is Hazardous to Your Health

Numerous studies show that the kind of self-control required to deliberately conceal information is psychologically and physically tiring. One study reported that gay men who hide their sexual orientation have an unusually high incidence of cancer and infectious disease—yet another reason why “Don't Ask Don't Tell” was a bad policy. (*Alex Stone*)

According to neurosurgeon Gopal Chopra, thinking about a deeply-held secret can cause the brain to ramp up the production of stress hormones, which impact your memory, blood pressure, gastrointestinal tract and metabolism. People who keep secrets about themselves have a natural tendency to revisit past transgressions and relive situations that often lead to feelings of guilt or inauthenticity. (*Slepian and Mason, Columbia Business School*).

1. Describe a situation in which you were put in a position of guarding information that actually had a physical or emotional effect on you.
2. Have you ever felt that others wouldn't really like you, “if they only knew?” Elaborate if comfortable doing so.

Topic Exploration B: Keeping Your Own Secrets

Family secrets and personal secrets can be some of the most destructive. Families are support systems; our identity and ability to form close relationships with others depend upon the trust and communication we feel with loved ones. If family members keep secrets from each other, or from the outside world, the emotional fallout can last a lifetime. Individual well-being conflicts with group fidelity; conversation is superficial; silence and distance replace true intimacy. While each situation has

many nuances and should be addressed on a case-by-case basis, some of the benefits of revealing secrets are these: reduce guilt and open paths to healing, eliminate the fear of accidental revelation by others or outsiders, remove the barrier between you and those affected by the secret, inhibit the perpetuation of the unacceptable behavior or situation.

3. “Don’t hang your dirty laundry in public,”—did your family have that attitude, and how did that affect your tendency to keep personal matters private?
4. Describe an incident in which revelation of a long-kept family or personal secret had a positive outcome. Then describe one in which the revelation caused lasting harm.
5. Most of us have secrets that we’d just as soon forget. How successful have you been in tamping down memories of the past and going on with your life?

Topic Exploration C: Keeping Secrets of Others

Being entrusted with a secret can be both a delight and a burden. You might be honored that someone trusts you enough to tell you a secret, but be aware that if you betray that trust, you could damage the relationship. One reason it’s hard to keep a secret is that when you avoid telling others, you often must lie, either overtly or by omission, which can be uncomfortable. Further, in casual conversation, it’s sometimes difficult to keep track of what you’re allowed to say and what you aren’t. Before agreeing to keep a secret, it might be well to consider the following: Determine the seriousness of the secret; ask how long it must be kept; are you allowed to tell anyone else; are you the only one who knows; will the secret eventually be revealed by the one with the secret? If the answers cause you disquiet, it may be best to refuse to hear the secret.

6. A test called the Self-Concealment Scale gauges how secretive people are on a scale of ten (very open) to 50 (a bank vault.) How would you rate yourself on such a scale, and why?
7. Have you ever been charged with keeping a secret that you didn’t want to keep, and how did that affect your relationships with others?

Closing Reading (alternate)

Deciding not to reveal a hurtful secret is usually easy, while deciding to reveal it is hard. But if it's a secret you're withholding from someone with whom you're intimate—a spouse, a parent, a sibling, a best friend—even if it need never come up, it represents a barrier, a schism, between you and that person. Maybe you can tolerate that schism by simply not thinking about it. But maybe you can't. Which is why a good rule of thumb by which to live your life is to try not to have any secrets to keep at all—that is, to not do anything you can't tell the people who matter the most to you. (*Alex Lickerman*)

Check-out and Reflection on Today’s Session: How were your needs for connection and spiritual growth met by this session? Do you feel your voice was heard?

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
these we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping