

Wisdom Circle – Community
February 2016

Words of Wisdom

“We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.”

~ Cesar Chavez

“To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination.”

~ Bell Hooks

“A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm.”

~ Henrik Ibsen

“What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured.”

~ Kurt Vonnegut

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee.”

~ John Donne, No man is an island

“We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.”

~ Dorothy Day

When they are alone they want to be with others, and when they are with others they want to be alone. After all, human beings are like that.

~ Gertrude Stein

We don't accomplish anything in this world alone. ... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something.

~ Sandra Day O'Connor

Readings

“Visit to the Baptist Church” by Jennifer Channin

When I was a child, my UU Sunday School class visited a black Baptist church that was just down the street from my own church in Princeton, NJ. Of course, some obvious differences stood out in the service—like that people in the Baptist church sang much more loudly, and shouted “Amen” during the sermon. But the memory that stayed with me the most was that there was a time during the service when people were encouraged to stand up in front of the congregation and share something going on in their lives. Then, people who stood up in front of everybody and said, “I lost my job and got evicted from my apartment. I need a place to sleep for a week while I work something out.” Or they said, “My aunt is sick and can't prepare her own food, can anyone help bring her food?” And when they did this, people stood up from their seats, right there in the congregation, and shouted out, “I've got an extra room in my house,” and “I'll bring her some meals.”

This was so astonishing to me because in my own church, I was sure, people would have been too embarrassed to admit such needs in front of everybody, and I think that people would have felt uncomfortable seeing others make themselves so vulnerable, in such a public way. And yet, I knew people, in my own UU congregation, who had been temporarily homeless, who needed help at times with childcare, with getting rides to church or to work, or who struggled with traumatic situations at home. If we needed each other in some of the same ways that the Baptists needed each other, why would we be afraid to talk about it publicly?

I, like many of us, was raised and taught to believe that *progress* can be measured by our ability to be independent, our ability to choose what to do with our lives and take care of ourselves without relying on the assistance of other people—at least people we know personally. However, none of us are truly independent, nor could we be. There is a false consciousness at work when whose whom we call our “community” are those who only see our good sides – our strong, capable, fun, self-sufficient, and seemingly-independent aspects. We all have needs. We all have bad days, weeks, and even years.

Across the entire human race, there is one thing that every single person shares in common, and that is that we were once an infant, completely dependent on others for all of our needs. And most of us will one day be in a position where we will again be dependent on others for our basic needs. Needing and Giving are some of the most fundamental aspects of being human. Being more comfortable with our neediness can be a way to be more connected with our basic humanity, and sharing our neediness with others can connect us with others in a way that is more personal, and more spiritually fulfilling, than simply enjoying each others' company.

Excerpt, by Rev. Raymond J. Baughan

We deceive ourselves if we think we can be grasped by life's meaning, or a sense of the holy, before we find and are found by our fellow human beings. There is no sense of the sacredness of life, no sense of the holiness of sheer existence that does not come first through another person. Human encounter is common: human acceptance is rare. Religious community is people reaching through all the facades people carefully place around them-people embracing people where they live and struggle, what Henry Nelson Wieman calls 'creative interchange.' The most radical contribution religion can make to human living is that it enables people to experience community as starkly as hunger.... Where life has a chance, we are in caring and in mutual need. When we are most alive, we are in the presence of someone or something intensely with us.... Nothing is experienced except in relation. It is participation in a religious community that stabs our consciousness into this awareness in the midst of a society that knows nothing about it.

Questions for Reflection:

- What do you need from religious community?
- Has what you've needed from community changed during your life?
- What gifts to you bring to the communities you are a part of?

Spiritual Exercise

We usually cannot choose everyone who we are in community with, and that is certainly the case in a large church such as ours. During the next month you are likely to encounter someone in your community who frustrates or upsets you. As a spiritual exercise, take some time to ask yourselves the following questions and reflect on the answers. It may help to write down your responses. What gifts does this individual bring to your community? What needs might this individual be trying to have fulfilled in this community?

**Wisdom Circle – Community
Session Plan**

This session plan is a suggested guide, not a rigid set of rules. You may adjust this plan as you feel is appropriate in your group.

Gathering & Welcome (~5 min)

Chalice Lighting (~2 min)

Optional Chalice Lighting Reading:

“We are here to be together, to celebrate our desire for community, to grow in respect for self in others. Through our direct speaking and attentive listening our circle of caring expands.”

-Barbara Hamilton-Holway

Check-In (20-30 minutes)

As you feel comfortable, take 2-3 minutes to share one thing that is lifting your spirits, and one thing that is weighing you down. This is a time for sharing, but not for discussion.

Business (10-20 minutes)

Use this time for any new business: Welcoming new members; Scheduling future meetings; Revisiting the Covenant; Answering questions about Wisdom Circle processes; Etc...

Discussion (60 minutes)

Introduce Topic. Take Turns Reading aloud the “Words of Wisdom.”

- What do you need from religious community?
- Has what you’ve needed from community changed during your life?
- What gifts to you bring to the communities you are a part of?

Silent Reflection (~2 minutes)

First Responses (Share in the order you feel moved)

Cross-Conversation (Ask questions that invite deeper reflection; Speak from personal experience, and use “I statements”; Avoid explaining or judging)

Final Thoughts (Share in the order you feel moved)

Gratitude (5-10 minutes)

Share 1-2 things that have been meaningful to you from this session.

Closing

Optional Song:

"From You I Receive" (Sing 3-5 times. If your group feels up to it, you can sing it in a round.)

From you I receive,
To you I give,
Together we share,
And from this we live.

(#402 in Singing the Living Tradition)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7a0Lei2OCA>

402 From You I Receive

The image shows a musical score for the song 'From You I Receive'. It consists of two staves of music in 3/4 time, with a tempo marking of quarter note = 120. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The first staff has a melody with lyrics 'From you I re-ceive, to you I give, to' and chords F, Bb, C, F. The second staff has a melody with lyrics 'geth-er we share, and from this we live.' and chords Dm, Gm, C7, F.

From you I re-ceive, to you I give, to
geth-er we share, and from this we live.

Words & music: Joseph and Nathan Segal, © 1969 Nathan Segal

RABBI
Irregular