

Wisdom Circle – Connection

January 2017

PREPARATION

Words of Wisdom

“I cannot exist without in some sense taking part in you, in the child I once was, in the breeze stirring the down on my arm, in the child starving far away, in the flashing round of the spiral nebula.”

~ Catherine Keller

“Invisible threads are the strongest ties.”

~ Friedrich Nietzsche

“If everything is connected to everything else, then everyone is ultimately responsible for everything. We can blame nothing on anyone else. The more we comprehend our mutual interdependence, the more we fathom the implications of our most trivial acts. We find ourselves within a luminous organism of sacred responsibility.”

~ Laurence Kushner

“We are like islands in the sea, separate on the surface but connected in the deep.”

~ William James

“To work effectively as an agent of change in a pluralistic society, it is necessary to be able to connect with people different from oneself.”

~ Beverly Daniel Tatum

“When we know ourselves to be connected to all others, acting compassionately is simply the natural thing to do.”

~ Rachel Naomi Remen

“We must realize that all life is valuable and that we are united to all life. From this knowledge comes our spiritual relationship with the universe.”

~ Albert Schweitzer

“Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.”

~ Chief Seattle

Readings:

Prepared by: Tania Márquez

When I was doing my required unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), or chaplaincy training, at a local hospital, I was assigned to the Surgical Intensive Care Unit (SICU). It represented a challenge from the beginning since most of the patients in that unit were intubated, comatose or just unable to communicate with words. My job as a chaplain was to offer them my presence and to find a way to connect with them and their families.

It took me a while before I felt comfortable speaking to them. Sometimes, family members were in the room and they were grateful to have someone offering them spiritual support. Sometimes, I would just come close to the patients and say a blessing even when they seemed to be unconscious. A couple of times, my blessing was greeted with eyes wide open and a tear rolling down someone's cheek. Nevertheless, I felt connected with them, connected beyond words, beyond theology, beyond differences.

We rely way too much on words to make connections or to feel connected to others. For example, when we find ourselves in a room full of people, we look for those with whom we can instantly or easily connect. To do so, we rely on language and cultural markers (place of origin, education, profession, entertainment or sports preferences, etc) in our conversation. But these markers don't help us connect with those with whom we can't connect in such visible and easy ways. Often, when we are unable to find an instant or easy connection with someone, we tend to retract and just go on with our lives. Sometimes, the ways in which we are disconnected from others are way more visible than our connections and so we immediately give a verdict that our differences are enough to keep us at a distance.

What CPE confirmed for me, is that we can always find other ways to connect with people or, at least, to make our connections visible. Those others ways, however, require us to step out of our comfort zones, to meet people where they are or to meet them half way. They require us to face our own discomfort, our own assumptions, and to become aware of our own narratives about ourselves and about others.

We often say or hear that we're connected, that we are one. At the same time, we also find ourselves constantly wrestling with the paradox of being one with others and wanting to be our unique selves. But I believe that reaching out across borders (ideological, physical, cultural, etc) requires us to look for creative, and sometimes non-conventional, ways to connect with others. In that sense, in a world that promotes divisions and differences, intentionally creating connections is a form of revolution.

Spiritual Exercise –

We humans are good at making connections of all kinds. Some we do automatically, without effort or intention, some require a little more brain power. When it comes to our social connections, some happen unexpectedly and take us by surprised but we recognize them immediately and assign value to them. Some we never, ever, see.

This month, I invite you to look for those connections that are not as easy to recognize or accept. The ones that require a little bit more from us. In other words, this month I'm asking you to make the threads of our interconnected web more visible to yourself.

Think about someone with whom you've had a hard time "connecting" and see if you can begin listing the ways in which you are connected to this person. Do this also with some of the random interactions you have with strangers and people you know. Think about how you're also connected to other beings and things. What's connecting you to them? How does it feel to make those connections visible?

Do this as often as you can and as many times as you can. It doesn't have to be structured at all and you can either write down your findings and reflections or simply meditate about them. Share your experience with the group.

Questions for Discussion:

- What's your reaction to the phrase "We're all connected"? What does it mean to you?
- Do you recall a time when you felt a strong connection to someone or something? How was it?
- Have you ever been surprised by finding a connection where you didn't think there was one?
- What are some of the challenges, if any, that you find in connecting with others?

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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:

“Small as is our whole system compared with the infinitude of creation, brief as is our life compared with the cycles of time, we are so tethered to all by the beautiful dependencies of law, that not only the sparrow’s fall is felt to the uttermost bound but the vibrations set in motion by the words that we utter reach through all space and the tremor is felt through all time.”

-Maria Mitchell (Singing the Living Tradition #537)

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 minutes)

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

Experience with Spiritual Exercise (15-20 minutes)

Silent Reflection (~2 minutes)

Invite participants to share any insights gained from the spiritual exercise. Participants can take turns sharing what their experience with the exercise was. Insight can also come in the form of resistance to a spiritual exercise or type of spiritual exercise. This is also a time for sharing but not for discussion. (15-18 minutes)

Discussion (40 minutes)

Introduce Topic and invite participants to begin by responding to the following questions.

- What’s your reaction to the phrase “We’re all connected”? What does it mean to you?
- Do you recall a time when you felt a strong connection to someone or something? How was it?
- Have you ever been surprised by finding a connection where you didn’t think there was one?
- What are some of the challenges, if any, that you find in connecting with others?

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)

Gratitude (5-10 minutes)

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

Closing

Optional Chalice Extinguishing Hymn:

#1023 *Building Bridges (Singing the Journey)*

“Building bridges, between our divisions, I reach out to you, will you reach out to me?”

With all of our voices and all of our visions, friends, we could make such sweet harmony.”

The image shows a musical score for the hymn "Building Bridges" (number 1023). The score is written on a grand staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 98. The music is divided into four measures, each starting with a circled number (1, 2, 3, 4). Above the first measure, the chords Fm and Cm are indicated. The lyrics are: "Build - ing Bridg-es__ be-tween our di - vi-sions, I reach out to you, will you reach out to me? With all of our voic-es__ and all of our vi-sions, friends, we could make such sweet har-mo-ny." At the bottom of the page, the words are attributed to "The women of Greenham Common peace occupation in England, 1983" and the music to "Contemporary English Quaker Round".