

# Listening Circles Group Guidelines

Adapted from "Vocation CARE:  
A Social and Spiritual Process for Discerning Christian Vocation"  
The Fund for Theological Education

- 1 Be fully present, extending and presuming welcome.**  
Set aside the usual distractions of things undone from yesterday, things to do tomorrow. Welcome others into this story space and presume you are welcome as well.
- 2 Listen generously.**  
Listen intently to what is said; listen to the feelings beneath the words. As Quaker Douglas Steere writes, "To listen another's soul into life, into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest gift we can offer to another."
- 3 Author your story.**  
We all have a story. Some might say, "I don't have a story" or "a story worth telling," but you do, and the world is in need of hearing it. You must claim authorship of your own story and learn to tell it to others so they might understand you, be inspired by you and discover what calls you to be who you are, to do what you do or to love what you love.
- 4 We come as equals.**  
We don't have the same gifts, limits or experiences, but no person's gifts, limits or experiences are more or less important than another's.
- 5 It is never "share or die."**  
You will be invited to share stories and comments in small groups. The invitation is exactly that. You will determine the extent to which you want to participate.
- 6 No fixing.**  
We are not here to set someone else straight, right a wrong or provide therapy. We are here to witness God's presence and movement in the sacred stories and comments we share.
- 7 Suspend judgment.**  
Set aside your judgments. By creating a space between judgments and reactions, we can listen to another person, and to ourselves, more fully.

## **8 Turn to wonder.**

If you find yourself becoming judgmental or cynical, try turning to wonder: “I wonder why she shared that story or made those choices?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me?” “I wonder what he’s feeling right now?”

## **9 Hold these stories and comments with care.**

There are many people who will benefit from the stories and comments they hear during our time together. Imagine hearing another as you would listen to scripture – attentively, mindfully and open to the Holy.

## **10 Be mindful and respectful of time.**

We all have something important to share, and the discipline of time invites us to focus and make particular choices about what to share and how much to share so that we might hear the deep longings of another’s soul.

## **11 Practice confidentiality care.**

We create a safe space by respecting the nature and content of the stories and comments heard. If anyone asks that a story or comment shared be kept in confidence, the group will honour that request.

## **12 Welcome discomfort and dislocation.**

In the midst of new and uncomfortable places and the company of strangers, move against an instinct to construct a mental space of safety or to check out. In what causes unease, see another world to be discovered. Perhaps it already lives secretly within you.

## **13 Love the questions themselves.**

Let your questions linger. Release the compulsion to answer them or to have them answered. Trust the questions to guide you toward loving first what you do not altogether understand. As the poet Rainer Maria Rilke says, “Have patience with all that remains unsolved within your heart.”

## **14 Believe that it is possible for us to emerge from our time together refreshed, surprised and less burdened than when we came.**

Expect that our work together can provide renewal, refreshment and possibilities for what we can do together to create the future that is waiting to be born, and that seeds planted here will keep growing and flourish in the days ahead in service to God’s church and renewing work in the world.

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