

## Centering Prayer Groups

**Purpose:** To support the Centering Prayer practice in the context of a small community that prays together, and participates in faith sharing.

### **The group agrees:**

- To come together to pray and support each other with a regular weekly or bi-weekly meeting.
- To establish norms for the group experience, i.e., time frame, prayer time, topics for exploration and introduction of new members into the group.
- To gently encourage the essence of faith sharing which involves one's own personal experiences in one's own words, not abstract ideas (using the pronouns "I" and "me," instead of "you" or "we").
- To gently discourage irrelevant sharing.
- That if anyone tends to monopolize the faith-sharing experience, the group can remind itself that time for sharing is for everyone.
- That the atmosphere during faith-sharing be non-judgmental and whatever a person shares be received with acceptance and support.
- To regard everything that is said as confidential and not for outside use.

### **The facilitator agrees:**

- To prepare the room for prayer, making it a hospitable environment with materials and equipment ready.
- To monitor the time for the group and help maintain its commitment to begin and end on time.
- To lead the prayer.

## Leading the Centering Prayer Group Meeting

These guidelines are presented to assist the Facilitator in guiding the Centering Prayer group consistently for each meeting. Most Centering Prayer groups meet for one hour, but many meet for up to two hours. The group can decide by consensus what formats to use and how long they want to meet.

- Opening prayer, chant, scripture, spiritual reading, or an excerpt from *Open Mind*, *Open Heart* as vestibule time.
- Begin the 20-minute Centering Prayer period with a prayer or by lightly ringing a bell/gong.
- End the prayer period by lightly ringing a bell/gong and/or reciting a short prayer, or the Lord's Prayer while others listen.
- Allow one or two minutes of silence before standing or opening the eyes.
- In addition to the prayer period, groups may choose one of the following formats:
  - Read from Thomas Keating's books. (optional)
  - OR
  - View a video from the "Spiritual Journey Series." (optional)
  - OR
  - Lectio Divina experience. (optional)

It is recommended that if one of the alternative formats is used, the Centering Prayer group should regularly return to the basic format from time to time so the group has time for extended faith sharing of their experiences and concerns about their Centering Prayer practice.

- Faith sharing: Invite group members to relate the material to everyday life, or to their experiences in Centering Prayer.
- Closing prayer. Make sure everyone knows the time and location of the next meeting.

## Guidelines for Sharing in Centering Prayer Groups

These guidelines are important to the community as they come together to share.

- We accept one another as we are.
- We do not give advice.
- We do not criticize what others share.
- We listen attentively and without interruption when someone else is speaking.
- We keep the sharing in the group absolutely confidential.
- We share experiences from our own lives, not abstract ideas.
- We gather to care, not to cure or remove the crisis or pain. God does the healing.
- We decide among ourselves how much time we will devote to sharing, making sure that each person who wants to share will have a chance to speak.
- We are always free to remain silent if we wish.

These guidelines can be discussed by the group and modified if desired, to fit the particular needs of the group. When the guidelines are agreed upon they should be returned to from time to time to renew the group agreement.

It is helpful to print copies of the agreement for each member and to have on hand some copies to give to new members.

The guidelines are suitable for personal sharing about the effects of Centering Prayer, *Lectio Divina* reflections, as well as discussions of the “Spiritual Journey Series” and books by Thomas Keating.

### **The Essence of Faith Sharing**

FAITH SHARING **is not** a theological discussion; no speeches, homilies, or dissertations are required. It is not an information model.

FAITH SHARING **is not** an answer to anyone’s problems; nor is it a place to vent frustration. It is not a therapeutic model.

FAITH SHARING **is** my experience of God in my personal history or journey of life. It is a mystery model.

FAITH SHARING **is** living in the messiness and vulnerability of life; sharing the joys, sorrows, hopes, and fears of the human journey and God’s faithfulness in that journey.

FAITH SHARING **requires** reverential listening in prayerful silence; “my experience” is the content and “my experience” is not discussable or debatable. 10 Nov 2019 Hammersmith