

“When the church engages in prophetic witness how does it affect me, my church, the world?” and “When the church is silent about such issues how does it affect me, my church, the world?”

Circles of Peace:

A model of communication that invites us from conversation to action

The model is comprised of three circles placed inside a single larger circle. The rims of the circles are firm. There are strong boundaries around the intention of the circles, their time and task. This is deliberate and will be part of the covenant of the circle. The circle takes the community away from the hierarchical form of community that we have become used to and takes us forward into a model where each voice is heard – and those being silent are noted.

In Christina Baldwin’s book **Calling the Circle** she describes the circle as follow:

- *a council of ordinary people who convene to create a sacred space and accomplish a specific task, supporting each other in the process.*
- *has a sense of containment, a beginning, middle and end framed through simple rituals appropriate to the group.*
- *has a shared, verbalized intention that everyone knows why they are gathered.*
- *self-governs and corrects its course through the adoption of commonsense agreements of behavior.*
- *when confusion arises, everyone agrees to reflective silence, refocus on the group’s highest purpose and follow protocols for problem solving that reestablish trust and cohesion.*
- *responsibility is shared as the group comes to rely deeply on Spirit.*



Circle of Peace

Why a Circle:

To form a circle is the choice to remove oneself from the middle, and to place something else there around which we all can gather. Every circle, from the first campfire to the United Nations, asks for this commitment: to put at the center the group’s highest purpose, and to sit on the rim focused on that purpose. Humans started here– literally facing the fire and tending the needs of the community– and here is where we return–using circle to face the burning questions of our times and tending to their solutions. (from <http://www.fromthefourdirections.org/>)



Circles of Inquiry:

The goal of the circle is to give many views their voice, to investigate the issue by asking sincere questions, and tell stories of how the issue relates to each participant. The circle will be called for a set period of time that can be revisited by the members of the circle.

Although the discussions will hopefully have someone in the group who feels passionately about acting on the issue or needing support and healing around the issue, the Circle of Inquiry is not the place for that. The Circle of Inquiry should be a safe place for someone to

support **and** for someone to disagree. If someone is seeking support and sees the group as an advocacy group for them, it is much less likely that someone who sincerely believes it is wrong will speak up and share their opinions and questions in fear of hurting someone in the community whom they care about. Circles of Inquiry are not for everyone.



Circles of Advocacy & Action

As a result of discussion, members of the Circle of Inquiry and other members of the community may want to move forward into some form of advocacy or action. This circle is **not** the same circle as the Circle of Inquiry. As a result of the Circle of inquiry someone might want to be part of the change happening around the topic. This might be advocating for or against legislation, sharing information about current political actions that have an effect on those affected. When people understand an issue, they are more likely to get behind it – for good or ill depending on your perspective on the issue.

It is possible that opposing views may come from Circles of Inquiry. What we have gained from the process is that we have a better understanding of those with whom we disagree. We disagree on the issue and with the action and still are able to remember the story and humanity of those with whom we disagree.



Circles of Healing

The third circle is a Circle of Healing. This may be a support group of people affected by the topic. It may also be a group of people who want to participate in offering support to those affected. It will be a community of people with a common need or a desire to provide a non-anxious presence while waiting for healing to happen. It is possible that two or three different circles may form with different intents. And that is as it should be.

Covenants

In order for the circle to work, there are covenants to which the participants agree at the first meeting. The following covenants were developed by Christina Baldwin and can be found on the Peer Spirit website: <http://www.peerspirit.com/htmlpages/circlebasics.html>

- We will hold stories or personal material in confidentiality and honor other material, information or decisions with a level of confidentiality appropriate to the setting.
- We listen to each other with compassion and curiosity.
- We ask for what we need and offer what we can.
- We agree to employ a group guardian to watch our need, timing, and energy. We agree to pause at a signal, and to call for that signal when we feel the need to pause.

A note about confidentiality: It is important within the community of the circle that participants feel safe to share their stories without fear that things will be shared outside the circle without their permission. It is also important to the larger community that the learnings of the circle be shared. When sharing the new wisdom gleaned from the circle, it is best to use I statements rather than share personal information belonging to someone else.