

UUCMC Covenant Circle September 2017: WELCOME



Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

Please pass the reading of this passage around the group one paragraph per person.

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Welcome?

Welcoming is most often associated with “bigness.” We speak about “expanding the circle” and making more room. We talk about make ourselves larger through the practice of welcoming in new experiences and new ideas. But there is also the work of becoming smaller. And sometimes that is the even more important work.

For instance, those of us who are white are learning that true welcoming of diversity just can’t happen until we shrink and de-center our voices. We also know that expanding community and welcoming newcomers requires right-sizing our needs and putting our preferences second. Welcoming regularly involves the smallness of humility and willingness to listen and learn. The great spiritual teachers remind us that the key to feeling at home in the universe is seeing ourselves as a tiny but precious part of a greater whole, rather than believing that the whole world revolves around us. Downsizing and living simply allows us to welcome in more experience, adventure and peace. And, of course, there’s also the work of downsizing our egos enough to admit mistakes, ask for forgiveness and welcome in the work of repair.

Bottom line: There is a deep spiritual connection between the smallness of self and the expansiveness of relationship. It’s a curious and wonderful truth: the road to widening the circle often starts with limiting our own size. By becoming “smaller,” we paradoxically are better able to welcome in and receive the gift of “more.”

Reminder of our Covenant:

Let folks know we are bound by a shared covenant of how we want to be together. Remind them of the pieces of it you think they need to be reminded of.

Check-in/Sharing: Maybe 3-4 minutes apiece.

Topic/Activity: 45 minutes. Today we are going to talk about *a community of welcome*.

Welcome dates back to Anglo-Saxon days, from *Beowulf*. The word was originally *wilcuma* in Old English, a combination of *wil* (pleasure) plus *cuma* (guest). The verb form, *wilcumian*, meant to receive someone with pleasure.

Wise Words:

1. We are lonesome animals. We spend all our life trying to be less lonesome. ~ *John Steinbeck*
2. Here we are – all of us – all upon this planet, bound together in a common destiny,
3. Living our lives between the briefness of the daylight and the dark. Kindred in this, each lighted by the same precarious, flickering flame of life, how does it happen that we are not kindred in all things else? How strange and foolish are these walls of separation that divide us! ~ *A. Powell Davies*
4. Belonging: It's not quite love and it's not quite community; it's just this feeling that there are people, an abundance of people, who are in this together. ~ *Marina Keegan*
5. Where you belong is where you choose to constantly choose to show up. ~ *Karina Antonopoulos*
6. When you recover or discover something that nourishes your soul and brings joy, care enough about yourself to make room for it in your life. ~ *Jean Shinoda Bolen*
7. The more you judge, the more you will feel different and on the outside. ~ *Karina Antonopoulos*
8. It's amazing really. As a human being all you have to do is enumerate exactly the way you don't feel at home in the world, and the moment you've uttered the exact dimensionality of your exile, you are already on your way home. ~ *David Whyte*
9. Sometimes the urgency of our hunger blinds us to the fact that we are already at the feast. To accept this can change everything; we are always home, never exiled. ~ *John O'Donohue*
10. "We all belong here equally... Just by being born onto the earth, we are accepted and the earth supports us. We don't have to be especially good. We don't have to

accomplish anything. We don't even have to be healthy." ~ *Polly Horvath, My One Hundred Adventures*

11. "I believe every inch of America is sacred, from sea to shining sea. I believe we make it holy by who we welcome and by how we relate to each other. Call it my Muslim eyes on the American project. "We made you different nations and tribes that you may come to know one another," says the Qur'an." ~ *Eboo Patel*
12. "Whiteness has been used throughout the histories of America and Europe to praise desirable groups of people and exclude undesirable groups. But "whiteness" is not an ethnic group, a cultural group, or a nationality. In the United States, the Supreme Court legally defined what it meant to be "white" in a pair of decisions in 1922. In other words, whiteness was created by law to let some people in and keep others out..." ~ *Sarah C Stewart, from The Story of Whiteness*
13. The me that shows up in mostly white UU spaces isn't inauthentic, but it is guarded and not my full self. ~ Rev. Marisol Caballero
14. "Hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbor into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories, and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit" ~ *Henri Nouwen*

Silent reflection

Your Question

Pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal of these questions is not to help you analyze what joy means in the abstract, but to figure out what being a part of a community of joy means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?

1. Do you spend more time welcoming in gifts or keeping out threats?
2. Can you remember the last time you truly "widened the circle"?
3. Might widening the circle mean you stepping away from the center?
4. Do you notice your ruts? Have you slipped so deeply into routine that you don't even notice anymore? When was the last time you welcomed in something new?

5. What would it mean to give yourself permission to shut the door for a while? Have you been too welcoming and tolerant of a toxic relationship or soul-killing commitment?
6. Is your house really ready for guests? Sometimes we need to get our house in order before we welcome in the new? What kind of clutter in your life needs cleaned up?
7. Is believing “I’m the only one” or “No one can understand” separating you from belonging?
8. Do you know yourself well enough to know where you belong?
9. Do you believe that you have to earn belonging? What would your life look like if you didn’t have to prove that you’re worthy?
10. That mess or roadblock which just came your way? Are you sure that it’s not a guest in disguise trying to offer you a gift? Are you sure you need to fight or fix it? Or is welcoming it in and embracing it what you really need to do?
11. Are you ready to finally let that grief in?
12. What’s your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

Housekeeping Details: 5 minutes - Next meeting. Questions or thoughts on logistics?

Check-out:

Please let’s go around quickly. Just say word or two about how the session went and/or how you are feeling or anything else you didn’t get a chance to say and want to say before the time together ends.

Closing Words: From Edwin Markham

He drew a circle that shut me out--
Heretic, a rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!



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