

## **Covenant Elements for Circles of Trust**

A Circle of Trust has no agenda except to help us listen to our own souls and discern our own truth. Materials for reflection will be sent for each gathering. We will offer empathy and mutual support as we share how this content is relevant in our own individual lives. Reflections and personal stories are shared in a confidential and supportive environment.

Circles of Trust create a safe communal container in which to hear and honor the sacred story of each person. This sharing is not about advice-giving, fixing, teaching, therapy, or problem-solving. Instead, the Circle of Trust is a place for compassionate, non-judgmental listening and honest sharing. While the convener aids in holding the space, each of us shows up to actively listen, share from our hearts, and listen to hear the holy in the ordinary.

**Daily Reflection** – Set aside time for yourself each day to dwell in deep prayer and introspection. Let your thoughts, feelings, and images emerge. Give it time. Let the reflections, quotes and questions sink into your soul. This is a process that unfolds over time, not in one sitting, so return to the same reflections on more than one occasion.

**Journaling** – Consider journaling as a spiritual practice. Journal at the beginning or at the end of the day, or once during each week—whatever rhythm suits you best. Journal your responses by letting your words flow without regard for literary style, spelling or grammar. Be aware of your thoughts, feelings, what moves and touches you on the heart level. If the journaling takes you beyond the specific questions, then go there. Allow the questions to prompt, not limit, your writing. Above all, be honest and real. Reread your journal before the next meeting.

You may want to use a variety of mediums to deepen your reflections (reflective walking, sitting in nature, creative expression, art, music, poetry, walking a labyrinth). Use whatever means you might like to help you reflect deeply upon the material. Notice what is happening inside you.

**Sharing and listening** - Your spiritual journey is personal as well as relational. Bring your reflections to your Circle of Trust. The intimacy of sharing your

story and listening and responding to one another is a powerful means for building community. Sharing and listening are significant to the process and both are needed for a delicate balance in the experience. Listen deeply to one another as you walk this journey together. You have a choice, in fact, the responsibility, to determine your own boundaries for what you share and with whom.

The Circles of Trust are meant to be a “no advice zone.” This is not group therapy. You are not there to tell each other what to do, problem solve, fix, advise, or save one another. You are not there to pat one another on the back for what you have done, or criticize, gripe or complain about what others have done.

What’s left if you can’t advise, fix, problem solve, or save? **Your presence.** You are being asked to listen, disclose and dialogue in a contemplative, yet interactive manner. You are invited as mutual companions to be present to one another in your sharing. You are gathered as equals, no matter your title, position or expertise. You are there to deepen your personal and collective understanding of where the suggested material has taken you in your reflections. Your undivided attention and genuine interest in one another, your deep listening and presence to one another, is what matters most.

You are asked to be active listeners. Tell each other what you have heard each other say so that everyone knows what others have understood them to say. In other words, summarize or paraphrase, at times, what you’ve heard. Offer empathy by trying to capture the heart of the matter in what others are saying. Note especially the feeling words. Ask open ended questions to help the other person go deeper. Listen beyond the spoken words and offer hunches about what they have not yet said but what might be underneath. Most importantly, be mutual in response to what others share, challenging yourself to open up to others in a similar way to how they had opened up to you.

Don’t let a personal disclosure go by without someone responding. Respond to one another with what you understood each person to say and how you were affected. Then share in kind. Be mutual by offering your own vulnerability. No advice, experts or therapists allowed!

**Commitment to Circle Gatherings** – Be faithful to the gatherings. When one or more are absent, the group dynamic changes. You are missed. Try to be on time, so that we can begin promptly.

**Mutual Support for the Group** - Whatever your spiritual practice, we invite you to remember each other between meetings. This positive exchange of support will add energy and power to this process.

**Confidentiality** - What happens in the group is sacred. We ask that you deeply respect and reverence what is said in the group. It is the basis for trust.