

Introduction: Sexuality, Gender, & Faith

September 10, 2023

Gathering

Our Shared Work:

Education Forums (see separate handout & church website for details)

Small Groups:

Host: The host is someone (or someones) who open their homes to the small group. The priority of the host is to ensure everyone is welcomed and cared for during the gathering of the small group. Some hosts may provide refreshments like hot tea, coffee, or water. While others may create a space for group members to bring items to share. Each group and each host will do this differently. The host is part of the leadership team assigned to each group and should work closely with the facilitator and holy listener to ensure each gathering is a healthy experience for all group members.

Facilitator: The facilitator's main job is to cultivate and encourage healthy conversation amongst group members. Facilitators are not subject matter experts so much as they are cultivators of holy conversations. A good facilitator knows that some folks will naturally want to speak more (these are the extroverts) and that other members (the introverts) have valuable thoughts and questions to share as well, they just need a little quiet space and perhaps an invitation to share what's on their hearts and minds. Therefore, the facilitator will help conversations and necessary times of silence flow throughout each small group meeting.

Holy Listener: Holy listening means that we listen with the awareness that God is with us, in the presence of each person, and in the space between us. The holy listener in each group will say very little each time the group meets because their main job is to hear what group members are saying (with their words as well as with their body language, etc.). Holy listeners will take notes and record observations, trends, common questions, etc. that emerge during each small group meeting. When appropriate, the holy listener may reflect back to the group some of the things they've heard and observed during the meeting.

Group Covenant: All groups are encouraged to create a covenant at your first small group meeting. A covenant is a sacred commitment that groups of people make with one another. In small groups, covenants help us remember why we are gathering *and* the behaviors we've agreed upon to create and protect safe space for all group members. Covenants are especially important when dealing with sensitive and often divisive content.

Sample Covenant¹:

- 1. Listen.** Hear what is being shared. Be open to hearing perspectives and experiences that are different from yours.
- 2. Show respect and dignity.** Regard participants and their experiences as valuable and worthy of time and attention.
- 3. Embrace discomfort.** It is okay to experience discomfort. The tension you feel now may be creating space for growth.

¹ Edited list from *Confronting Whiteness Participant Guide*. Ben Boswell, 2022. First adapted from *What LIES between Us: Fostering First Steps Toward Racial Healing*. Initially developed by educator, author, and co-founder of the *Brownicity* learning community, Lucretia Carter Berry. The guidelines for creating "grace space" are intended to foster and maintain an atmosphere where healing and growth can occur in a small group setting.

4. **Participate.** Fully engage the session activities and your journal. Speak up during meetings but don't drown out the voices of others.
5. **Be free from guilt, shame, and condemnation.** Being socialized by [any normative] ideology is not a criminal offense.
6. **Use "I" not "we."** Avoid making statements that imply group representation. Speak for yourself, not "your people" or "those people."
7. **Avoid debating.** Back-and-forth personal debating indicates that someone is not listening and is counterproductive to contributing to a grace space.
8. **Keep a confidential table.** If someone in your group says something that upsets you, please don't out them in public spaces.
9. **Respect the process.** There is no quick fix. [Any transformative process, especially one as complex as this will consist] of many steps and cycles—learning, lamenting, deconstructing, healing, restoring, building.

Our Personal Work:

Resources Page on GBC Website: www.greystonechurch.org/sexuality-gender-faith-resources/

Do you have a Spiritual Practice that grounds you?

Tools for the Journey: Body Prayer and Journaling

Body Prayer Anchors²:

Anchor 1: Soothe yourself to quiet your mind, calm your heart, and settle your body.

Anchor 2: Simply notice the sensations, vibrations, and emotions in your body instead of reacting to them.

Anchor 3: Accept the discomfort - and notice when it changes - instead of trying to flee from it.

Anchor 4: Stay present in your body as you move through the unfolding experience, with all its ambiguity and uncertainty, and respond from the best parts of yourself.

Anchor 5: Safely discharge any energy that remains.

Journal Prompts:

Self Examination:

What do I bring into this? Hope...? Fear...?

What is important for me to be able to embrace this time of learning?

What commitment to this process am I able to make?

Looking in the Mirror:

What do you know about sexuality and gender?

Who or what were your first teachers about these subjects?

Have you ever shifted your thinking on these topics? If so, who or what instigated or prompted the shift?

Noticing Our Responses:

What did you hear that was new to you?

How did you feel (emotionally and in your body) as you listened?

What lingers in your mind as you are sitting with or processing what you've heard?

What follow up questions, or clarifying questions, do you have?

² Resmaa Menakem provides us with 5 anchors in her book, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies* (2017).