

Appendix II: Five Guidelines for Learning Circles

A learning circle that gathers to use *We Make The Road by Walking* is on a quest for spiritual formation, reorientation, and activation. We aren't seeking to impress each other, to convince each other to agree with us, or to fix each other. We desire everyone to gain deeper understanding from and with one another, and to practice gracious ways of relating to one another. To keep our space safe and open for deeper understanding and growth to occur, we will observe these five guidelines:

1. The guideline of participation: Our goal is for all to share and all to learn, so all should feel encouraged but not pressured to participate. Before and after you have made a contribution, welcome others to contribute by listening from the heart with uncommon interest and kindness. In so doing, you will “listen one another into free speech.” Avoid dominating, and gently seek to draw out those who may be less confident than you. Be sure to express appreciation when others share honestly and from the heart.
2. The guideline of honor: We honor one another for having the courage to share honestly and from the heart. It is important to freely express your own views without insulting the views of others. Advising, silencing, fixing, upstaging, correcting, or interrupting others often leaves them feeling dishonored, so these responses are not appropriate among the learners in this circle. Often, using “I” language helps in this regard—for

example, “I see that differently” instead of “You are wrong.” Trust that a safe, honoring environment will make space for their “inner teacher,” God’s Spirit, to guide others better than you can.

3. The guideline of silence: Silence is an important part of every good conversation. Don’t rush to fill silence. Expect that important insights will arise through silence. Often, right after a silence has become a little uncomfortable, it becomes generative and holy.
4. The guideline of understanding: Each question or prompt is designed to promote something more important than agreement or argument: understanding—of ourselves and one another. So see differing views as a gift and an opportunity for greater understanding, not argument. Our full acceptance of one another does not infer full agreement with every opinion that is expressed. Assured of mutual honor, in the presence of differing views, we will all experience greater understanding.
5. The goal of brevity: It’s important to feel free to think out loud and speak at some length at times. But in general, err on the side of being too brief and having people ask to hear more, rather than on the side of taking more than your share of the group’s time.

Each participant should verbally agree to these guidelines, or another set of guidelines the group prefers. Leaders can help the learning circle address problems as they arise, always keeping the goals of spiritual formation, reorientation, and activation in mind.