



SECRECY, PRIVACY and CONFIDENTIALITY

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Covenant Group Session Plan

Written by Sandy Westin, January 9, 2023

Welcome, Chalice Lighting: In this place together, we light this candle in honor of the light within each of us, the light among us, and the light we bring into the world.

Personal Check In: Share something new or changed from your life since we last met, and how you are feeling now.

Opening Reading

Definitions:

- **Secret:** Not known or seen or not meant to be known or seen by others.
- **Private:** Belonging to or for the use of one particular person or group of people only.
- **Confidential:** Known or conveyed only to a limited number of people; marked by or indicative of intimacy.

Secrecy can overtly serve personal interest, as when children keep information from others to avoid punishment, like concealing that they didn't eat their broccoli. But secrecy also serves more fundamental purposes: it contributes to the formation of our inner awareness and autonomy; it creates a space for the imagination; and, as well as being a weapon of exclusion, it is an essential tool of friendship.

— Tiffany Jenkins, *“My Secret Life: On the benefits of secrecy”*

Caveats for today's topic:

- No one needs to share anything about themselves in this session that they don't choose to.
- Our Covenant includes a privacy agreement: What is discussed in Covenant Circle is not to be shared with others.

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. How do you see the three terms Secrecy, Privacy and Confidentiality as being different or similar?
2. Is it ever moral or ethical to disclose another's secret, private or confidential matters?
3. Should personal secrets be kept from one's spouse, intimate partner or family?
4. Should personal secrets be revealed in one's Will or on one's deathbed... or not?
5. Have you had secrets earlier in your life that you later were comfortable sharing?

Sitting in Silence: Reflect on questions just read and prepare to hear readings.

Readings (See quotes below.)

Sharing: This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share one or more of your responses to the session questions.

Open Discussion: This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared. Continue to practice deep listening.

Closing reading:

“All human beings have three lives: public, private, and secret.” — Gabriel García Márquez

Announcements/Plans

Personal Check Out: As we close today, how are you feeling now?

Extinguish the Chalice:

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community or the fire of commitment for these we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

READINGS (Quotes with no reference are in the public domain.)

"If you reveal your secrets to the wind, you should not blame the wind for revealing them to the trees."

"Three may keep a secret if two of them are dead." – Benjamin Franklin

"Secret keeping is an art of compassion towards the person to whom it belongs."

"If I maintain my silence about a secret, it is my prisoner. If I let it slip from my tongue, I am its prisoner."

"Every secret relationship has an expiration date."

"Secrets confer a kind of power."

"I don't know why people are so keen to put the details of their private life in public; they forget that invisibility is a superpower." – Banksy

"Privacy is a function of liberty." – Edward Snowden

"I believe in a zone of privacy." – Hilary Clinton

"Sometimes you just need your privacy." – Rihanna
"I don't know why people are so keen to put the details of their private life in public; they forget that invisibility is a superpower." – Banksy

"Once a confidentiality has been undermined, the integrity of the relationship as a whole is seriously in question."

"Confidentiality is the essence of being trusted." – Billy Graham

"Be careful who you trust. If someone will discuss others with you, they will certainly discuss you with others."