**Fostering Empathy**

Greenville UU Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Covenant Group Session Plan

Revised by Pam Stevenson October 2020

**Welcome, Chalice Lighting:** *Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a holy place. We light the chalice of Unitarian Universalism in honor of the light that lives in each of us, the light that shines among us, and the light we bring into the world.*

**Personal Check In:** Briefly share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

**Opening Reading:** "You know, there's a lot of talk in this country about the federal deficit.  But I think we should talk more about our empathy deficit--the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes; to see the world through the eyes of those who are different from us---the child who's hungry, the steelworker who's been laid-off, the family who lost the entire life they built together when the storm came to town.  When you think like this--when you choose to broaden your ambit of concern and empathize with the plight of others, whether they are close friends or distant strangers--it becomes harder not to act; harder not to help."

~Former President Barack Obama

**Questions to prompt and guide discussion:**

1. How do you see empathy as an essential human quality?
2. Where does empathy come from?
3. Do you believe animals show or feel empathy? Tell us your thinking about that.
4. What are examples of ways you have shown empathy to others, or ways you have felt empathy from someone else?

**Readings** – see below

**Sitting in Silence**

**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 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 their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice deep listening.)

**Closing reading:**

Suffering and joy teach us, if we allow them, how to make the leap of empathy, which transports us into the soul and heart of another person.  In those transparent moments we know other people's joys and sorrows, and we care about their concerns as if they were our own.

~Fritz Williams

**Announcements/Plans**

**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. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

**Readings:**

Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another and feeling with the heart of another. ~*Alfred Adler*

You can only understand people if you feel them in yourself. ~*John Steinbeck*

If you judge people, you have no time to love them. ~*Mother Teresa*

We judge what we don’t understand. ~*Unknown*

If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it. – Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1962)

Empathy grows as we learn. ~*Alice Miller*

Never look down on anybody unless you’re helping him up. ~*Jesse Jackson*

No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care. ~*Theodore Roosevelt*

We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak. ~*Epictetus*

Don’t cast shadows on anyone unless you are providing shade. ~*Terri Guillemets*

There is no greater loan than a sympathetic ear. ~*Frank Tyger*

When I get ready to talk to people, I spend two thirds of the time thinking what they want to hear and one third thinking about what I want to say. ~*Abraham Lincoln*

You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know when it will be too late. – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Resolve to be tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant with the weak and wrong. Sometime in your life, you will have been all of these. ~*Gautama Buddha*

Empathy is about finding echoes of another person in yourself. ~*Moshin Hamid*

If you put shame in a petri dish, it needs three ingredients to grow exponentially: Secrecy, Silence and Judgement. If you put the same amount of shame in the petri dish and douse it with empathy, it cannot survive. ~*Brene Brown*

Empathy is when a person accurately communicates that they see another’s intentions and emotional state. It means watching your child’s frustration and focusing on how life feels in that little child’s body, while putting your own anger and agenda into the background. ~*Andrea Nair*

Real empathy is sometimes not insisting that it will be okay but acknowledging that it is not. ~*Sheryl Sandberg*

Empathy is really the opposite of spiritual meanness. It is the capacity to understand that every war is both won and lost. And that someone else’s pain is as meaningful as your own. ~*Barbara Kingsolver*

I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel. ~*Maya Angelou*