

## **USG Small Group Ministry Curriculum: October 2017 ~ Compassion**

### **Chalice Lighting** – *Read aloud together*

If you want to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.  
—Dalai Lama

### **Check In**

*Share briefly what has been on your mind lately or highs and lows since we last met. We will listen to each other without asking questions or offering advice to allow people the safety to share what's in their hearts.*

### **Quotes for Inspiration**

In English there are at least three words that describe the capacity to feel the feelings of others. *Empathy* is the capacity to feel another's feelings. [...] *Sympathy*, on the other hand, is empathy plus caring. When we're sympathetic to others, we want them to be happy and well, we don't want them to be upset or unhappy. We actually care about them. *Compassion* is sympathy for others specifically in the case of their suffering. Although it is uncomfortable, we are willing to feel the suffering others and do something about it when we can, even if all we can do is be with them.

—Norman Fischer, *Training in Compassion: Zen Teachings on the Practice of Lojong*

The act of compassion begins with full attention, just as rapport does. You have to really see the person.

—Daniel Goleman

Our task must be to free ourselves ... by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

—Albert Einstein

True compassion does not come from wanting to help those less fortunate than ourselves but from realizing our kinship with all beings.

—Pema Chödrön, *Start Where You Are*

As we feel the pain that all people feel in facing an uncontrollable world, compassion naturally arises—even for our 'enemies.'

Ezra Bayda, *Saying Yes to Life*

We are always beginners in the art of compassion. No matter how advanced or refined we believe our understanding to be, life is sure to present us with some new experience or encounter with pain we feel unprepared for. Your partner betrays you, your teacher disappoints you, some event of unimaginable cruelty happens in the world, and once more you are asked to open your heart and receive it. 'This also, this also' is the essence of compassion. Over and over you are asked to meet change, loss, injustice, and over and over you are asked to find the strength to open when you are most inclined to shut down.

—Christina Feldman, *Compassion: Listening to the Cries of the World*

## **Spiritual Exercises**

1. Practice compassion for yourself.
  - a. Make a list of all your good qualities. What do you like best about yourself?
  - b. Remember times when you have helped someone, whether or not anyone noticed them. Make a list of these memories.
  - c. What do you need to mourn? Are there painful memories that still make you wince or that bring tears to your eyes? Practice giving yourself loving care—the kind of care you wish someone else had given you or would give you now.
  - d. Breathe in peace and breathe out love toward your own growing self.
2. Practice compassion for others.
  - a. Practice bringing compassion to difficult conversations. During a contentious conversation, practice treating the other person as an honored guest. Attempt to ask questions rather than make statements. Practice curiosity. Inquire about another person's particular view and what informs it.
  - b. Send compassion to strangers in the midst of mundane activities. Sharon Salzberg suggests we practice “guerrilla compassion,” silently blessing people in line at the bank, at the supermarket, in the cars next to us in traffic. Each blessing is a tiny sanctuary offered to a hurried and unsuspecting world.

## **Questions for Contemplation**

1. Of compassion for yourself and for others, which do you find comes most naturally?
2. What does compassion feel like in your body?
3. Was there ever a time when you didn't feel compassion for someone you cherish? How did that affect your relationship?
4. Pity and despair are easily confused with compassion. When we pity someone we may distance ourselves too far from their suffering to feel compassion, and when we feel despair we may be too close to another's suffering to offer compassion. How do you distinguish between the sensations of compassion, “do-goodism,” codependency, pity, and despair?

**Sitting in Silence** *Take a few minutes to sit quietly and reflect on this topic.*

**Sharing/Deep Listening** *Deeply listen without responding or thought of responding is the gift we give and receive as we share our thoughts on today's topic.*

**Reflection** *This is a time to supportively respond to something another person said or relate additional ideas that have occurred to you as others have shared.*

**Singing** *Spirit of Life, Singing the Living Tradition, #123*

Spirit of life, come unto me. Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.  
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea, Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.  
Roots hold me close; wings set me free; Spirit of life, come to me, come to me.

## **Extinguishing the Chalice**

“When all is quiet and we are small and the night is dark, may we hear the tender breathing of all who lie awake with us in fear, that together we may gather strength to live with love, and kindness, and confidence.” —Jane Ranney Rzepka