

## USG SGM ~ Pluralism ~ May, 2024

drawn from Soul Matters materials, see the full packet for more of all of these elements  
www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com



**Editor's Note:** *Spiritual exercises this month, require completing forms, listening to recordings and taking quizzes. So be sure to go through them well in advance of your actual small group meeting so that you can arrive fully prepared to engage. Also, some of the exercises take us into the realm of the political. It may take extra effort to stay on course with the spiritual and individual elements of pluralism, and not let the discussion be simply another political debate or group screed.*

**Chalice Lighting** You have your way. I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist. Friedrich Nietzsche

**Check-in** *Share your highs and lows since we last met focusing on what drains you and what lifts you up. We give each other the gift of listening without asking questions or offering advice to allow people the safety to share what's in their hearts.*

**Spiritual Exercises** It's one thing to analyze a theme; it's quite another to experience it. By pulling us out of the space of *thinking* and into the space of *doing*, these exercises invite us to figure out not just what we have to say about life, but also what life has to say *to us*! Pick the exercise that speaks to you the most. Come to your group ready to share why you picked the exercise you did and what gift it gave you.

**Option A - Your Personal Pluralism - Mapping Your Many Identities** Pluralism is most often applied to conversations about communities. But it's just as relevant to individuals. We don't have an identity; we have identities. As Walt Whitman famously said, "I am large, I contain multitudes!" But we rarely - if ever - step back to reflect on how those multitudes influence us and interact with each other. And without that reflective distance, our many identities end up sneaking into the driver's wheel. So, this month spend some time getting to know your many selves, your pluralism within.

Start by mapping/listing as many of your identity markers as you can. We've put together a chart with various identity categories to help:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/17LZghnZV3QnNB\\_zLx7ug7yDdkO9t\\_8RFMDvN87fBb8A/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17LZghnZV3QnNB_zLx7ug7yDdkO9t_8RFMDvN87fBb8A/edit?usp=sharing)

Reflect on your list of identities using this set of questions:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BCaesIU2lnY-nQRJ29iYjk7rFqEV87ooqCNW7mxE19E/edit?usp=sharing>

**Option B - Is Our Polarization More Pluralistic Than We Thought?** - In addition to personal pluralism, there is - of course - political pluralism. With the presidential election gathering steam, possibly no topic is as pressing as how does America move away from a dangerous polarization and into a healthy pluralism? Our political landscape is not just divided into liberal and conservative camps. Apparently, there is a third segment as per the following interview: [What Motivates the Voters with a 'Need for Chaos'?](#) Come to your group ready to share what you heard and think!

**Option C -Test Yourself** - Political polarization is in the way of healthy political pluralism. And misperceptions about ourselves and our political "opponents" is arguably one of the main drivers of polarization. Addressing such political misperceptions of others and ourselves is what these quizzes are all about. So, dig in, get informed... and have some fun!

- [The Perception Gap Quiz](#) - Be sure to read [this article](#) about other findings from this group.
- [Pew Research Quiz](#) - At the end of the quiz and after it gives you information about your results, there is a button inviting you to, "Select another typology group to learn more about it." Be sure to check this out.
- [Politics of Disgust Quiz](#) - Don't pass this one up, even if it sounds odd. Be sure to check out this related [TED Talk](#) and [book](#).
- [New York Times Quiz](#) - Just imagine if we had a strong six-party system rather than a dysfunctional two-party one!
- [Political Bias Quiz](#) This is one we all need to spend time with! (Related article: <https://www.vox.com/2015/9/10/9188517/political-bias>)

### Quotes for Inspiration/Readings

Because she wanted everyone to feel included in her prayer, she said right at the beginning several names for the Holy Spirit: she said, Holy One, Mystery, God...

Then, although she hadn't imagined it this way, others began to offer names:

Peace, said one. One My Mother Knew, said another. Ancestor, said a third. Wind. Rain.

Breath, said one near the back. Refuge. That Which Holds All...

And then, there wasn't any need to say the things she'd thought would be important to say, and everyone sat hushed, until someone said... Amen. [Nancy Shaffer](#)

People are just as wonderful as sunsets if I can let them be. In fact, perhaps the reason we can truly appreciate a sunset is that we cannot control it. When I look at a sunset as I did the other evening, I don't find myself saying, 'Soften the orange a little on the right hand corner, and put a bit more purple along the base, and use a little more pink in the cloud color.' I don't do that. I don't try to control a sunset. I watch it with awe as it unfolds. I like myself best when I can appreciate my staff member, my son, my daughter, my grandchildren, in this same way. Carl Rogers

Ask yourself, "What kinds of people do I talk about but never talk with?" Whoever is underrepresented in your life, will be overrepresented in your imagination!... This is the truth of our divided landscape.

[Mónica Guzman](#)

**Questions** This list of questions is an aid for deep reflection. They are not meant to be answered as much as to take you on a journey. Read through the questions 2-3 times until one question sticks out for you and captures your attention, or as some faith traditions say, until one of the questions "[shimmers](#)." Then reflect on that question using one or all of these questions.

*What is going on in my life right now that makes this question so pronounced for me?*

*How might my inner voice be trying to [speak to me](#) through it?*

*How might Life or my inner voice be trying to offer me a word of comfort or challenge through this question?*

1. What were you taught in your family of origin about pluralism and welcoming difference? How does that still impact you today?
2. Has an experience of being included or excluded permanently left a mark on you?
3. If you could go back and change a moment of being excluded or excluding someone else, what would it be?

4. If you weren't afraid of being judged or rejected, what part of your diverse self would you let out into the world?
5. When it comes to age, our society is not as pluralistic as it thinks. Have you been ignored or cast out because of your age? Was it more emotionally challenging to accept than you expected?
6. Most on-going disagreements are sources of pain, division, and discomfort. But ironically some disagreements feel "[fruitful](#)"; They somehow enrich us and our relationships. How has a precious "fruitful disagreement" changed you? Is there wisdom from this fruitful disagreement that could be applied to other areas of your life?
7. **What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to find it.

**Sitting in Silence** *Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect upon your thoughts.*

**Sharing/Deep Listening** *Respond with your thoughts and experiences with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention rather than thinking about what you will share.*

**Reflection and Gratitude** *This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared. Consider lifting up one comment or experience for which you are particularly grateful.*

**Singing or watching a video:** Consider *Free to Be, You and Me* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCUGMMEF2Zk>

**Extinguishing the Chalice** - Pluralism isn't easy. It's a constant willingness to self-challenge and to look at where we might be wrong, or limited; even with regard to pluralism itself. It requires a capacity to detach ourselves from our agendas, our beliefs, our commitments, and to recognize that there may be other ways. And it also requires us to recognize that we can never wholly achieve that. [Mick Cooper](#)