

USG SGM ~ Inclusion ~ February, 2025

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

www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com



You hardly knew
how hungry you were
to be gathered in,
to receive the welcome
that invited you to enter
entirely...

You began to breathe again...
You learned to sing.

But the deal with this blessing
is that it will not leave you alone,
will not let you linger...
this blessing will ask you to leave,
not because it has tired of you
but because it desires for you
to become the sanctuary
that you have found...

[Jan Richardson](#)

Jan Richardson begins with hunger. And so do we. Just saying the word "inclusion" conjures it up: The primal hunger to belong; the longing to be let in. No one likes standing outside the circle. No one likes leaning against the locked door listening to everyone else laughing inside. From the time we are little, inclusion and belonging is the thing we seek. It's the hoped for Holy Grail. The promised resting place.

But Richardson will have none of that. To belong is only the beginning. That's what she wants us to know. One minute she's wrapping us in comforting words about settling in and allowing ourselves to finally breathe. The next she's shaking us awake and telling us to get up and go.

That shaking should tell us something.

Or to put it another way, hers is not a gentle invitation. It's not some sweet reminder to think of others. It's a warning: Beware of the kind of belonging that *only* wants to *bless* you!

Deep down we know this. The hard part is to remember it. To use Richardson's language, if we find ourselves being invited to linger rather than leave, alarm bells should go off. We need to be weary of those who welcome us with a members only card and a soft couch. They may have let us in, but soon they will enlist us into the work of keeping others out. There will likely even be a part of us that wants to keep others out. After all, closed circles don't just set us apart, they also sit us above.

But they also keep us small. Maybe this is why Richardson's blessing is so intent on not leaving us alone. It knows that we only grow when the circle does. Circles that keep others out also keep the air out. No one inside a closed circle truly sings; they only suffocate, slowly.

It's all one big reminder that the true blessing of inclusion is *not* that you get to come inside the circle; it's that you get to participate in expanding it. As the circle grows, so do we.

Chalice Lighting

Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance. Verna Myers

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

Option B: Include the Other Side's News

News has become one of the biggest walls between us and one of the greatest impediments to inclusion. It's not just that we don't agree about the news; it's that we literally listen to different sets of news stories. And on top of that, we don't even know what the other is listening to! So let's use this month to learn what's going on on the "other side" and get some perspective on how biased our news might be!

Here are two great ways to go about it:

- Listen to a Podcast from Across the Aisle - Check out this list of the top ten podcasts from the left and the right. Pick one or two and listen to them regularly for at least a week.
- Get Your News Labeled Left or Right: Another option is to sort your news for the entire month through one of the many apps out there that identify how biased the source is. We recommend these two: Tangle: Gives you the left and right's take on each news story. Ground News: Identifies which way each news story leans. Come to your group ready to share whatever insights, challenges and personal change that arose for you from digesting the news in this new way.

Option D: Make Room for Them in Meditation

Inclusion is about opening doors; it's also about opening hearts. And heart work takes time. It requires a willingness to let the struggle and pain of others slowly wash over you until you are turned into something softer, something able to feel the needs of others as your own.

This slower and softer path is what meditation is all about. So we've created a playlist of 16 videos for you to meditate on this month. They aren't meant to be watched and listened to all at once. Rather, you are invited to spread them out and weave them into your morning or evening meditations just one or two at a time. You might consider journaling about them in each sitting, but the most important thing is to pay attention to how they alter the way you travel through your days. Here's the link to the playlist:

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvXOKgOQVYP7Ryv7fhqhaDCTOIf5UIhbV&si=JtUBJksn4t4uUnO>

Quotes for Inspiration/Readings

I believe every inch of America is sacred, from sea to shining sea. I believe we make it holy by who we welcome and by how we relate to each other. [Eboo Patel](#)

This is almost always the by-product of expanding the table: God is right-sized. Rarely, if ever, do you do the work of hospitality, authenticity, diversity, and agenda-free relationships and encounter a smaller, more selective God. John Pavlovitz

If justice is what love looks like in public, then inclusion is what love looks like among groups.
Rev. Matthew Johnson

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch... and her name

Mother of Exiles... cries she, with silent lips.
"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me...

[Emma Lazarus](#)

Questions

1. When were you first “saved” by someone who widened a circle to let you in? If you could talk to them today, what would they say to them?
2. Has an experience of being excluded permanently left a mark on you?
3. Have you ever invited and included something or someone in your life that unexpectedly altered the trajectory of it, something or someone that broke you out of a stifling rut, challenged you to finally face something you were avoiding, or forced you to grow in a way that you wouldn't have on your own? If so, what did the experience teach you about courage, risk, luck or grace?
4. What aspect of your personality do you need to do a better job of embracing and welcoming in? Your judgmental self? Your lazy self? Your vulnerable self? Your bitter self? Your easily frightened self? Your quick-to-anger self? Your jealous self? Your petty self? Your selfish self?
5. What if Black History Month is not just a call to remember but also [a form of reparations](#)? If so, what might Black History Month be asking of you to include [in your awareness and action](#) this month?

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.*

Extinguishing the Chalice

Put the mantle of your protection
Around the bodies of
The young and defenseless...
Take the hand of the despised

And diseased and walk proudly with them
In the high street.
Some might see you and
Be encouraged to do likewise
[Maya Angelou](#)