

GROUP SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

and

PEACE CIRCLES:

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Thesis written by:

Kiri Saftler

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Introduction

Serendipitously I began facilitating Peace Circles at the same time I enrolled in the Claritas Interspiritual Mentorship Training Program in August 2005 to learn the skills of Interspiritual Mentoring more commonly known as Spiritual Direction. At once I started seeing parallels in both processes. I received my certificate in Spiritual Mentoring in February 2007 and decided to continue my education with the Lorian Association - Soul Friending Masters Degree Program in June 2007 to hone my Spiritual Direction skills. I guess you could say, I felt the call and I listened to it. As David Spangler says in the book The Call, “It is up to us to shape the curriculum. We pick the courses” (109). I did exactly that.

This thesis demonstrates how Peace Circles are a form of Group Spiritual Direction and shows the correlations between the two models. It will exemplify the “call” to explore God and Peace from personal, religious and spiritual perspectives and discuss the similarities and differences of the group processes, content, and the director/facilitator roles in each. Further, it will explain how my work as a Spiritual Director has enhanced my abilities as a Peace Circle facilitator, and relate how Incarnational Spirituality is apparent in both. Group Spiritual Direction and Peace circles are indeed “birds of a feather”.

Many terms are being used today in the field of Spiritual Direction: Spiritual Mentoring, Spiritual Companionship and Soul Friending are three common terms. For the purpose of simplicity and uniformity in this paper, I will predominantly use the term

Spiritual Direction. Likewise, many words such as Divine, Mystery, Holy Spirit, and Sacred, are used in this paper, all are referring to “God.”

While in the Lorian Soul Friending program, I received a letter from Liz Ellman Director of Spiritual Directors International (SDI) who wrote:

SDI is a unique, global, multi faith community that fosters inner peace through compassionate listening. Compassionate listening is a contemplative practice that results in global peace and justice. Peace takes practice. Peace is hard work. Peace needs a supportive community. Spiritual Directors International acknowledges you as a person of peace during this season of peace and invites you to pass the peace to someone who might appreciate the support of being in a global contemplative community. (Letter mailed to all S.D.I. members Dec. 2007)

This was the confirming statement I needed for continuing on this journey of documenting in a thesis how Peace Circles reflect the process of Group Spiritual Direction and how the skills used by a Spiritual Director are applied to and benefit the participants in Peace Circles.

Chapter I

Longing for Peace is similar to Longing for God

My personal journey into the comparison between Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles came about because I noticed the similarities in the longing for God and the longing for Peace. For some people Peace is a more graspable concept than God. Looking for union with God may seem too mysterious, illusive, or impossible. Union with self or other (human, pet, or nature) feels more tangible and possible. For others a sense of internal peace arises out of a relationship developed with God, which does not feel at all separate to them. And once peace is found in that union they attempt to dance the same dance with the incarnate family as well.

What is truly of spirit will find confirmation in freedom and peace in the demands of life and what is of the spirit leads to deep peace in God and in the freedom to love those God gives us. (Edwards 23)

“May S/He Rest in Peace” is often spoken at funerals (religious or not). This statement contains a palpable reverence and subtle reference to God and provides comfort for most as they grieve. In my opinion, when people have a sense of God or Peace they tend to live happier lives. When out of peace they tend to forget God or beg God to help return them to that place of peace. One of Webster’s definitions of peace reads, “a state of tranquility or quiet, freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions, harmony in personal relations” (620). Many religions refer to peace and godly connections as values and morals to live by. In this chapter, I will offer selections with references of God and peace from many spiritual traditions.

In an interview with Nancy Reeves and Shaun McCarthy, McCarthy states,

I would say the relationship of union with God, with the Mystery we call God, is essential to the quest for a communion of peace, justice and love among all people. And Reeves adds, I think it gives so much hope to know that our brothers and sisters in other faith traditions are also concerned about peace and justice and offer us different things we can learn from their traditions. (Whiston 18)

In the book Simply Sane, Gerald May discusses the universal longing for peace among humans.

But we all do long for peace. The question it seems to me is what peace really means. I think we yearn for peace not as an end or a final goal in life, but as a means toward greater fullness of living. In this sense, peace means spiritual freedom, a freedom not only from conflict and disharmony, but also a freedom for love, creation, healing and growth. (May 132)

May believes that all people long for shalom, (132) a biblical Hebrew word usually translated as Peace, which connotes much more than the absence of war. This belief is also expressed in the UNESCO Constitution; “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.”

In her article, “Giving Back; Spiritual Direction for Non-violent Activists of Faith” Karen Brandow asserts that the principals of non-violence emerged from the spiritual tenants of several religions. She suggests that activists rely on their faith foundations to motivate and sustain their work. Wayne Teasdale, in his book The Mystic Heart, discusses the *Universal Declaration of Non-Violence*, inspired by the Dalai Lama and Christian Mystics in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s.

It applies the spiritual resource of non-violence to teaching the religions themselves to be responsible for a more peaceful future. It holds them responsible for rejecting not only individual acts of violence and aggression but the systematic violence of war itself, especially as sponsored by organized religion. It was the insight gained from spiritual practice that produced the awareness that this kind of declaration was necessary. Although it is barely known now, it will someday surface and help guide humankind. (Teasdale 119)

History is full of guidelines for and examples of peace based on non-violent activism. The Buddhist tradition offers the Noble eight-fold path and the Four Bramaviharas.

One way Buddhists measure their progress on the spiritual path is to ask themselves if they are becoming more peaceful? (Taylor 52)

According to Brandow, Zen Buddhist precepts specifically outline ethical behavior. In Christianity, Christians use the example of Jesus as a teacher of non-violence through the parables of the Gospel that offer works of mercy. Quakers and Mennonites also have a history of resistance and promoting peaceful activism. Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu, taught non-violent action through his faith as well. In Islam, the Prophet Mohammed saw that turning to more peaceful methods helped him achieve his goals. Finally, The Torah and Talmud of Judaism both inspire non-violence through the practice of tikkun olam, which means to heal the world with God as your partner (40). Brandow concludes that, “Spiritual practice can help activists sustain in a peacemaking ministry.” (44)

Liz Ellman interviewed Paul Haller and David Steindl-Rast and asked them:

What about the role of spiritual practice and meeting with a spiritual guide as a way to encourage peace in our world and the courage to act for social justice? How has working together across spiritual traditions helped you understand that?

Paul and David’s responses were related to the offering of meditation and other practices in social justice systems: jails, alcohol recovery programs, homeless shelters and stress reduction classes. Paul also spoke about peace marches and how human values are honored regardless of the marchers’ religious affiliations, or lack thereof.

Each tradition has a goal to make you a more integrated human being, not a better or Buddhist or Christian. (Ellman 28-29)

This validates my thought that people inherently want to be better human beings.

When talking about people in Jewish Spiritual Direction who do not see themselves as religious, Zari Weiss advises helping these Jews express their beliefs through their actions in bringing about a better world. Weiss notes this is very much in line with Jewish values. They would help the stranger, work for peace, fight for justice, and have compassion for the vulnerable. These actions may be seen as avodah or service to God, humanity and the universe. (Vest 55)

Union with the Divine Self is the definition of yoga in Sanskrit. Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles both have this divine union at the core of their philosophy. When participants focus on peace they find a divine union in their core that connects them to the wholeness of self and soul. They become more in touch with the Divine, Sacred, Source of All, Holy Spirit or the Mystery (whatever name used to express that which is beyond name and form).

A young boy in the third grade came to me after our very first Peace Keeper game and asked, “This is yoga isn’t it?” It took me a moment to answer him and finally I replied, “Yes, this circle process is about union and that is what we are doing with our classmates. We are forming a community or union.” Seeing the expression on his face I knew this moment was sweet and profound for both of us.

In Wikipedia, in a paragraph about Peace, it states that in the Great Lakes region of Africa the word for peace is kindoki, which refers to the harmonious balance between human beings, the rest of the natural worlds, and the cosmos. I appreciate the vast encompassing and embracing of all that exists in this definition rather than the “absence of

war” definition or even Martin Luther King’s definition, which includes the presence of justice.

The Arabic greeting that is analogous to “hello” in our culture is As-Salaam Alaykum, which means “Peace be with you.” The response is Wa Alaykum As-Salaam, which translates as “With you be peace.” The Hindu’s have a similar greeting Namaste which means “the God in Me Greets the God in You, or I bow humbly before You.” Both the Arabic and Hindu greetings genuinely acknowledge being with and blessing the other, in God and Peace.

Many references to peace connected to Spirit exist in the great Buddhist teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This quote is taken from a letter sent out by Spiritual Directors International in December 2007, “World peace must develop from inner peace. Peace is not the absence of violence. Peace is the manifestation of compassion,” (These words of His are inscribed on the Congressional Gold Medal presented to His Holiness on Oct 17, 2007)

In Peace Circles I often include prayers for peace from various religions. Included below are two of the prayers. This Native African Prayer of Peace presents the idea that where there is God, there is Peace:

Almighty God, the great thumb we cannot evade to tie any knot; the roaring thunder that splits mighty trees: the all seeing Lord up on high who sees even the footprints of an antelope on a rock mass here on earth. You are the one who does not hesitate to respond to our call. You are the cornerstone of peace.

The message that peace is an inherent quality of God is reiterated in this Muslim prayer for peace:

In the name of Allah the beneficent, the merciful, Praise be to the Lord of the Universe who has created us and made us into tribes and nations that we may

know each other, not that we may despise each other. If the enemy incline towards peace, do thou also incline towards peace and trust God for the Lord is the one that heareth and knoweth all things. And the servants of God, most gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and we address them we say "PEACE".

What a powerful message, to greet all in Peace.

The Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan and his disciple Samuel Lewis have many references that support the belief that longing for peace is similar to longing for God:

Through motion and change life becomes intelligible; we live a life of change, but it is constancy we seek. It is this innate desire of the soul that leads one to God. (Khan, June 25th)

No matter what our aim or object in life, its security does not bring us happiness. There is a constant struggle between our attraction toward joy and our attraction toward peace. This struggle causes our involution and evolution, and its end is not attained until the two are brought into equilibrium and coalesced. That is to say, the nature of God or Nirvana is not a dead-peace, but Life in its fullness, Love in its magnificence, Light beyond our conception. When we have tired of changing phenomena and seek God alone, we find that constancy, that peace, that joy. (Commentary by Samuel L. Lewis (Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti)

Murshid Samuel Lewis spoke of his understanding of the oft-used word Peace.

Words are not peace. Thoughts are not peace. Plans are not peace. Programs are not peace. Peace is fundamental. It is easy to prove in the sciences, and the real spiritual masters who are here are teaching it. It is fundamental to all faiths, all religions, all spirituality. It is from this that everything was, or let us say, "In the beginning was Peace and the Peace was with God and the Peace was God, and out of this Peace has everything been made that was made." The difference between this Logos-Peace and what we generally call "peace" is that the latter is a vacuum, a zero, a nothing, a blank, a negative to the extreme. The Logos-Peace is fullness, all-inclusive, and expresses the human family. The human body is a society of myriads of cell units working together. The totality of humanity ('Adam' in Hebrew) is a society of myriads of personalities, which must work together in and with and under God. (Lewis web site)

Man must first create peace in himself, if he desires to see peace in the world; for lacking peace within, no effort of his can bring any result. What is peace? Peace is the natural condition of the soul. All thoughts, words, and actions that disturb the peace are sin, and all thoughts words, and actions that create peace are virtue.

(Khan, July 2)

These quotes elucidate the need to find that internally resourced (meaning comfortable, calm, or peaceful) place, then move into the world with a sense of full sovereignty or personal power.

In the 1930's Hindu teacher Swami Ramdas said:

Seek not to find peace and freedom in the external circumstances of life. True freedom and happiness are an inner state, which you acquire when you are in tune with God who dwells within you. Let the knocks you get in life turn you more and more toward God.
(Daily Om web site)

Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles help people reflect on those hard knocks in life and create meaning from them.

In his book Inner Peace, Parmahansa Yogananda, another respected Hindu teacher, made many references to God and peace:

Learn to live in that eternal happiness and peace which is God. (8)

When you have peace in every movement of your body, peace in your thinking and in your will power, peace in your love, and peace and God in your ambitions, remember, you have connected your life with God. (18)

An Arabic phrase commonly spoken by the Sufis is Allaho Akbar, which means "Peace is Power." This saying refers to being in our personal power and then, because we have accessed that place of peace, moving from that state we feel centered and in the grace of God.

Yogananda stated that:

God is present on the throne of peace within you. Find him there first and you will find him in all that is good and meaningful in life; in true friends, in the beauty of nature, in good books, deep thoughts and noble aspirations. Finding God within you, you will know that whatever in life gives you enduring peace is declaring to you the eternal presence of God. (114)

The Baha'i faith is based on the premise that, "Peace begins with me." Several statements illustrate this idea. The Baha'i assert:

Peace stems from an inner state supported by spiritual and moral attitude in which the possibility of endearing solution can be found. (Promise of World Peace 10)

No serious attempt to set human affairs aright to achieve world peace, can ignore religion. (17)

Religion is the greatest of all means for establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein. Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue and the lights of fairness, justice, tranquility and peace cease to shine. (18)

A fundamental lack of communication between people seriously undermines efforts toward world peace. (10)

Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles offer a way to open up communication or break down the barriers of communication by illustrating prejudice and identifying misunderstandings that help people see through one another's eyes and respect another's perspective.

Prioritizing values and making inquiry about spiritual morals is an objective of Spiritual Direction as well. Ann Kline quotes, Kenneth Leech from his book True Prayer (83):

The understanding of prayer is crucial to the understanding of social change. There is no split between spirituality and social responsibility. (Kline 42)

When people are awake to how their actions affect others and whether or not they are living the Golden Rule they have a realization that they are either living in integrity with their spoken values or they are not. The Golden Rule, a universal teaching of most of the world's religions, is usually interpreted as, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This proverb is also a core teaching in Peacemaking and Peacekeeping circles,

used as a moral code of ethics. The peace circle philosophy is based around respect, tolerance, seeing new perspectives and letting down any divisive barriers. “Treat others as you wish to be treated” is often stated as a guideline at the opening of Peace Circles. The statement is also commonly written in the values exercise offered in School and Community Peace Circles. The students inquire about and explore an important value that defines how they live their lives. When the values exercise is processed by the group one insight often recognized is that many values are similar. People want to live together and be good human beings, values reaching beyond religion and dogma.

Certainly, the New and Old Testaments of the Bible, make many references demonstrating how God and peace are related. The following are just a few examples taken from biblical passages to illustrate this relationship. Two bibles were consulted: Hands on Bible (HOB) and Holy Bible (HB) King James Version: More biblical references are listed in Appendix 1.

Psalms 34:14 - Depart from Evil, and do good; seek peace and pursue it. (HB, 881)

Psalms 34:14 - Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace and work to maintain it. (HOB, 548)

Matthew 7:12 - Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them for this is the law and the prophets. (HB Pg1406)

Matthew 7:12 - Do to others whatever you like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets. (HOB, 947)

Matthew 5:9 - From the Sermon on the Mount - Beatitudes: Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God. (HB, 1402)

Matthew 5:9 - From the Sermon on the Mount - Beatitudes: God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. (HOB, 944)

These passages and quotes shared from many world religions clarify the need to work for peace internally and externally, and strive to act in ways that you know are right and that mirror how you want to be treated. They also illustrate that joy and peace come to those who live and move in peace. Working toward experiencing a peaceful existence in this life is what I believe all souls are longing to feel internally.

Ruth Chaffee, PhD, faculty of the Lorian Association, writes in the Soul Friend course lecture notes when teaching about Internal Family Systems that, “All work on the Self is ultimately Spiritual Work.” Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles assist individuals to look at how they are living in the world and affecting society. They also share the quality of self-evaluation, soul searching, and processing everyday life issues. To the individual experiencing a longing of the mystery, be it God or peace, the outcomes revealed in Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles are quite similar.

Chapter II

What is Group Spiritual Direction?

In this chapter I will define Group Spiritual Direction using a variety of definitions gathered from several sources, explain components of Group Spiritual Direction and explore the skills required of a Spiritual Director.

Definitions of Spiritual Direction

In my work, I prefer to use the term Soul Friend and Spiritual Companion when defining Spiritual Direction:

A Spiritual Companion walks with another on their spiritual journey. Their role is to listen, reflect, and encourage while the others explore their relationship with the Sacred/Divine/God. (Saftler)

The brochure I give potential directees contains a four-part definition. (see Appendix II)

On the front cover, two people are walking toward a tree on a path. Beneath the image the caption reads; “Mystery Loves Company.” My belief is that Spiritual Direction offers companionship through the mysterious journey called life.

One of my directees defines Spiritual Direction in this way:

Soul Direction for me is a meeting of two people, one being the director, with the intention of deepening my awareness of issues and situations in my life. The intention is also to bring about more peace and understanding. The Soul Director's role, from what I have observed, is to ask questions in order to help me take a wider look into my life and bring forth more peaceful solutions to problems. Soul Direction for me is a process, an unfoldment of my consciousness with the help of another whose intention is to allow the voice of Spirit to come through. (Shelly)

Another definition is stated in [Listen, A Seeker's Resource for Spiritual Direction](#) published by Spiritual Directors International:

Spiritual Direction is the process of accompanying people on the spiritual journey. Spiritual Direction helps people tell their sacred stories every day. Spiritual Direction exists in the context that emphasizes growing closer to God (or the Holy or a Higher Power). Spiritual Direction invites a deeper relationship with the spiritual aspect of being human. Spiritual Direction fosters peace, justice, and respect for the integrity of creation. (Bernecker 1)

Ann Kline uses the Hebrew words tikkun olam, which means “repair of the world” in her definition of Spiritual Direction. She explains that Spiritual Direction assists us to find our inner spark and support others in exploring their own awareness. Sharing it with the world moves us to take action in the world of service and to co-create with God. (Dougherty, Lived 76)

All of these definitions describe a relationship between a seeker and a guide exploring the unique spiritual journey of life. Spiritual Direction is a gift individuals give to themselves, strengthening awareness about how the Sacred is moving in their lives and how they can personally attend to that movement. Listening for how this movement impacts the way we live our daily lives, and governs how we are affected by and are affecting others in the beneficial process of personal growth.

Group Spiritual Direction

Group Spiritual Direction has a similar purpose to private Spiritual Direction but is shared with a group instead of just one directee. The group offers a way for people to gather in an agreed upon structured format and listen for the ways that Spirit is moving their lives. They have the support of a community of people over a selected period of time to pray for and with each other. Together they listen for guidance and share reflections from Spirit.

According to Rosemary Dougherty, Group Spiritual Direction has its own set of qualities and guidelines that define this type of Spiritual Direction.

Dougherty states:

“The essential qualities that participants must have to participate in a group are:

- 1) A shared desire for God.
- 2) A reverence for the uniqueness of the spirit’s manifestation in each person.
- 3) A willingness to be prayerfully present for one another during the time in the group and to pray for one another outside the group.
(Dougherty, Lived 7)

Establishing guidelines and agreements adhered to by all participants is one essential component of group Spiritual Direction. These are the suggested guidelines according to

Dougherty:

- 1) Pray for one another.
- 2) Journaling to follow your process can be helpful.
- 3) Come prepared to witness others journeys and share from your own heart.
- 4) Be considerate, compassionate, and respectful of others’ ways.
- 5) Hold all in confidence.
- 6) Do proper closure when the group terminates or when one person leaves.
(Dougherty, Lived 14)

All of the qualities and guidelines proffered by Dougherty lead to the creation of sacred space, which can promote deep sharing from the heart and soul of the participant. The delicate art of creating sacred space is another component of Spiritual Direction. It helps participants feel comfortable and safe both in a physical environment and the unseen realm. There is potential for an awareness of something out of the ordinary. It allows a ritual format to be observed. External preparation for a group entails creation of an altar with candles and possibly other sacred objects. An example of creating a sacred environment for Spiritual Direction is in my home where I hold individual sessions in a

designated room or outdoors in one of the shrine gardens on my property. The Spiritual Direction room has shrines honoring a variety of spiritual paths. These shrines were from an art installation I created many years ago as a way to explore religions of the world and are now displayed as acknowledgment of my focus as an Interspiritual Spiritual Director.

In either situation, whether group or individual Spiritual Direction, I conduct an intentional energetic cleansing using one or several practices; smudging by burning sage or symbolically moving energy by waving a feather, allowing air flow by opening a window, sitting in silence, always lighting a candle and saying a prayer. These acts help to clear energy. The purpose of energetic cleansing is to remove anything unseen that could potentially block the group from having a profound experience.

I find Patricia Brown's guidelines for Spiritual Direction to be extremely appropriate and creative, exemplifying the component of sacred space in her list of guidelines. She uses her religion and humor to form what she calls "Be- Attitudes" for Spiritual Direction.

- Be-gin and end on time
- Be-trust-worthy
- Be committed to creating a community of spirit
- Be accepting of each other
- Be an active listener
- Be a keeper of confidence
- Be a supportive and affirming presence
- Be gentle hearted with yourself and others
- Be a consensus builder
- Be open to share from your true self
- Be honest
- Be comfortable with silence
- Be responsible for your needs.

Creating a sacred container and establishing guidelines for participants to agree upon when entering into a Spiritual Direction relationship creates safety and

understanding. This allows the spiritual journey to reveal itself in a sacred container, held by a director or a whole group.

Another integral component of Group Spiritual Direction is the use of a format or process, which all have agreed to and is consistently observed. The Claritas Institute recommends a very specific format. It begins with approximately twenty minutes of silence, then ten to fifteen minutes sharing by one person, which is followed by four minutes of silence. Then up to ten minutes is offered for listeners to share their reflections after which the group sits in silence again for ten minutes. Undoubtedly, other formats exist, and can be adapted to whatever is desired by and agreed upon to meet the needs of the particular group.

Group Spiritual Direction meets the needs of participants who desire community for reflection and who are willing to listen and support others on their spiritual journey. Having a clear intention, agreed upon guidelines and a particular format are essential for the group's cohesiveness and comfort. When these are established and abided by, participants feel nurtured, supported and are aware of being held in a safe container optimal for personal growth.

The Role of the Spiritual Director

The role of the Spiritual Director is varied and is extremely integral to Group Spiritual Direction sessions. The most important qualities of the Spiritual Director are being able to hold a sacred space for another in confidence and humility while accompanying them on their spiritual journey, helping directees stay focused on their relationship with the Divine, and offering reflection as is appropriate. Having no personal

attachment or agenda for the directee allows the director to get out of the way and remember, “that the real facilitator is God and the Circle” (Dougherty, Lived 28).

The integral core competencies of a Spiritual Director as defined in a handout by Janet Quinn from the Claritas Interspiritual Mentorship Training Program follow:

- 1) Deep Listening (ability to stay present)
- 2) Contemplative awareness - Be and not do, offer presence of Now
- 3) Attending to the mystery of everyday issues
- 4) Comfort in “Not-Knowing” (tolerance of ambiguity)
- 5) Curiosity of the heart
- 6) Compassion – allow others to find their own answers to the Spiritual questions in the context of their own lives
- 7) Trust/ confidentiality
- 8) Wisdom – integration of heart and mind (self awareness and reflection)
- 9) Stillness
- 10) Receptivity
- 11) Humility – being no one special (the ability to honor where the other is at)
- 12) Tolerance, appreciation and knowledge of the many paths to God (Interspiritual consciousness)
- 13) Awareness of interior freedom, and commitment to wholeness of Body, Mind and Spirit

Embodying these qualities, staying in integrity and having sincere compassion creates a formula for success and humility, while walking with others on their spiritual journeys.

Rosemary Dougherty, the pioneer of Group Spiritual Direction, created these guidelines specifically for a Spiritual Director facilitating Group Spiritual Direction.

Following are practical and concrete guidelines for guiding any circle:

- 1) Focus the group in its common agreed task
- 2) Model the process in the beginning
- 3) Encourage the group to use the time for prayerful listening and discernment
- 4) Do not assume too much responsibility for the process and trust the circle
- 5) Remind participants that they must be looking for community and be willing to pray for one another and be willing to listen in silence (Dougherty, Lived 7-8)

Additional qualities necessary for Spiritual Directors to obtain, which are not listed above, include having a system for personal observation to keep themselves in check, remaining aware of their own biases and knowledge and appropriate timing for sharing any insights. This awareness allows the directee the freedom for their own true discovery in their right timing and exposes the uniqueness of their individual spiritual journey.

The personal experience of rechecking my response to another's spiritual inquiry and allowing them to uncover their own revelations without my input has challenged me several times, producing growth for me as listener and director. Practicing the skill of pausing and reflecting in order not to offer my thoughts or ideas has given me the freedom to observe in a non-intrusive way.

Attentive care for the directee is essential. Having awareness of his or her own internal processes allows the director to be more astute. Pema Chodron states, "Some thought or other causes us to split off, and before we know it we are completely self absorbed," (54) and "Splitting in two is the moment when peace turns into war. It is a very common experience" (55). Our goal as Spiritual Directors is ultimately to be quiet, get out of the way, listen for Spirit and not let distractions take us off into our own inward journey.

Directing a group has specific challenges. As Webb states:

Since every group is made up of individuals with their own stories, groups are inherently complex organisms. People bring their issues from the past, hopes for the future and confusion about the present. They bring their insecurities and their desires to be seen known and loved. They want to be included yet they want to stand out. They act in profoundly caring ways, yet also act in irrational and alienating ways. The job of a Spiritual Director is to sort all of this out, or to at least invite the group into the process of sorting it out, and to try to weave a tapestry of connection in which the group can participate. (Webb 41)

In order to accomplish this task, a Spiritual Director must be well-prepared and willing to trust the circle.

A necessary and integral practice in preparation for any private or Group Spiritual Direction session is energy hygiene and space cleansing. Energy hygiene is the act of clearing out anything preventing one from being present in the moment and connected to spirit. Both internal and external preparation needs to take place. External preparation was explained earlier. As director, the type of mental and emotional cleansing I do is to review what is alive in the moment and present in my life. To prepare internally, I become aware and acknowledge any issue that needs my attention by bringing it into my conscious awareness. I can allow that issue to take a back burner knowing that I can pick it up later if necessary. In the moment I may also release it and let it go totally. Providing myself with quiet time to connect with Source is also essential. Sometimes I'll speak a prayer asking for Divine Guidance or sit in silence, simply noticing what is present for me to tap into when I'm quiet enough to listen.

Spiritual Direction can take on many forms and can move into various unpredictable territories once the directee (or group) and director are together. However, if the preparation, guidelines and process for being together are upheld and remain focused within sacred intention then, "Thy will be done."

Chapter III

What are Peace Circles?

In this chapter, I will include descriptions and components of several types of circle processes. I will define and reference the following types of Peace Circles: Circles of Ten: Women for World Peace, Way of Council, School/Community Building Peace Circles, Buddhist Peace Keeper Training, Peace Keeper Game, Restorative Justice Circles, TLC Peace Circles and Soul Peace Group. Peace Circle formats vary but all are intended to build a sense of community through deep listening and storytelling. In addition to defining these types of circle processes, I will share some of the philosophies and wisdom from other recognized circle work facilitators in the field, then describe my role as facilitator and conclude with outcomes observed.

Definitions of Peace Circles

The Circles of Ten – Women for World Peace

The Circles of Ten – Women for World Peace is a very simple, repetitive and straight-forward circle process. It is steeped in ritual format and was designed using three specific questions for inquiry. In a six-week committed setting, each participant is asked and responds by completing these statements:

“I feel peaceful when _____”,

“Peace for me would be _____”,

“In the name of peace I will _____”.

This format allows each person in the circle to have the opportunity to listen and be listened to without interruption while they explore their current reality of peace (or not)

and their deepest feelings. While facilitating one particular group a feeling was raised that these inquiries were not quite enough for the exploration the participants wanted to do. Subsequently, to fill the void, I implemented an additional question, “How did you make Peace this past week?” This addition was a very simple yet profound weekly reminder of internal and external peacemaking. This fourth question has helped many to focus on what is really important in their own lives and how to offer this knowledge and experience to others.

A common reflection spoken by participants in completion statements has been about noticing and appreciating that “what we focus on grows.” In the following Christina Baldwin speaks eloquently of this awareness:

For me to let divine sensation have its way, I need a daily practice that fosters peace of mind. While I take responsibility for the peace I bring to the moment I don't always feel very peaceful. (Baldwin 16). So everyday here is my choice: to escalate the mantra of anxiety, or to take a few deep breaths and say firmly to myself *this seems like as good a time as any to maintain Peace of Mind.*
(Baldwin 20)

I have heard similar statements from participants in Peace Circles while talking about their experiences in making peace a choice.

The Way of Council

The Way of Council is a circle process based on the Native Council format, where communication between people in the circle and ancestors is fostered. *The Way of Council* has been taught and practiced for over 20 years by the Ojai Foundation in California. Many people use Jack Zimmerman and Virginia Coyle's book *The Way of Council*. In the early days Joan Halafax, now Zen Buddhist teacher, was on staff of the Ojai Foundation. She is a spiritual guide who has used the council process in her Buddhist teaching and

community life at the Upaya Zen Center in New Mexico. Since then, others have carried the Way of Council to groups in all types of situations.

The use of a talking piece is an intentional and foundational component of the *Way of Council* circles, used explicitly to create respect for the person speaking as the others listen intently. The *Way of Council* circle offers community building for newly formed organizations and assists established groups in need of finding new ways to listen to one another, make decisions, and solve problems. Numerous techniques and tools are available to draw from but the main premise is community building through deep listening.

We believe that the many forms of council belong to all people who gather in circle to embrace the challenge of listening and speaking from the heart.
(Zimmerman and Coyle 5)

School Peace Circles

School Peace Circles are offered in middle schools and high schools. Usually students choose to participate, although sometimes guidance counselors or staff may recommend attendance. Other times circles are used as a restorative justice practice for resolving conflict. These circles are usually held off-campus or in a private room for the entire school day. Those attending the circle do not interact with others outside the circle during this time. A safe container is created by describing how council type circles were practiced by the Aboriginal and Indigenous cultures as a way to communicate, problem solve, and hear one another in an egalitarian manner. The students are asked to state their needs for building this safe container. The spoken needs are compiled into a list of guidelines, which are unanimously agreed upon for safety. Then inquiry questions and initiatives are posed, designed (but not absolutely predetermined) to build depth throughout the day fostering relationship building. The intention is to help students listen

to others and reflect on their own perspectives on life, beliefs, hurts, longings, prejudices, judgments, gifts, joys, etc. through the invaluable and remarkable egalitarian storytelling format.

Buddhist Peacekeeper

The *Buddhist Peacekeeper* circle is similar in format to the *Circles of Ten* and *Way of Council*. It uses an altar as a central focus, offers a talking piece and utilizes the inquiry process for all to reflect upon. *Buddhist Peacekeeper* circles are designed to foster community building. Members are focused on internal and external peace awareness while learning the art and developing skill of compassionate listening. One component that sets this circle process apart from the others is a Buddhist prayer that is spoken to open and close the circle.

TLC (Talking, Listening, Council) Circles and Soul Peace Circles

TLC (Talking, Listening, Council) Circles and *Soul Peace Circles* are groups I offer in my home to individuals from the community who respond to an inner call to join. I created the *TLC* circles after finding that, although the format of *Circles of Ten* provided a great foundation, ultimately the format was too limiting. As with the other processes described earlier, the key ingredients for successful circles include creating sacred space and safety, community building through storytelling and deep listening. The time commitment for the *TLC* circles is weekly meetings for six weeks and for the *Soul Peace Circle* is one meeting per month for a year. The difference between these two groups is that the focus on God is explicit and spoken in the *Soul Peace* group while it is not necessarily verbalized in the *TLC* circle. In the *Soul Peace Circle* a modified version of Rosemary Dougherty's Group Spiritual Direction format for sharing and listening is used.

This group has the element of Peace carried into the experience because only those who have attended the TLC circles are invited into the Soul Peace group. This step was taken so the group could take what was explored in the TLC circle and add their experience of God to it.

Peacekeeper Game

The *Peacekeeper Game* is a practice being used in elementary classrooms. Ideally this game is played weekly to keep things current and functional for building a sustainable and healthy classroom community. The set up involves placing an altar cloth in the center of the floor for the children to gather around. The students are introduced to the talking piece and guidelines are established. The game teaches students how to use “I message” language and other positive ways of communicating. An example of an “I message” is: “I feel sad when you don’t include me.” They learn how to express their feelings and how their daily actions affect other classmates. The circle begins with sharing gratitude and appreciation with one another. Once safety and trust are established, instruction on how to share grievances and hurts is slowly introduced. The children then learn how to formulate sincere apologies. I have witnessed some amazing wisdom from these children, as they share how it feels to be heard and express their feelings.

Teri Ashley, a fourth grade teacher recognizes the value of teaching listening skills for classroom management and relationship building. In an interview about the affects of the *Peace Keeper Game* with her fourth grade class, she talks about how it feels to be listened to:

Each person has a chance to tell their story uninterrupted. Each one has a voice and I am a part of it when I listen. These are real people with real problems. We have a chance to see one another as humans. Every one has

the experience of inclusivity and feels empowered to stand up and advocate for themselves without being silenced or experiencing violence.
(Building Responsible Student Communities DVD)

Restorative Justice (R.J.) Circles

Restorative Justice (R.J.) is an alternative method to punitive punishment commonly accessed in our judicial system. *R.J.* circles are developed to acknowledge the harm that was done and agree on ways to heal the harm. In addition, participants learn how their actions affect many more people than the obvious victim. Used in court systems and schools alike, *R.J.* circles can promote healing and relationship building between victim and offender. Although friendship is not the intended outcome, usually the result is more harmony and the institution of realistic consequences for actions and a lowered recidivism rate. *R.J.* Circles revolve around the principal that by nurturing feelings of connection and belonging and building relationships with one another, (“putting a face on the enemy”, as voiced by the *R.J.* trainers) we help bring more peace into this world. When we sit and face the person who is harmed and have the opportunity to correct the harm done, we are potentially reducing and preventing more harm, increasing personal awareness, and creating compassion for another.

Components of Peace Circles

Most people have a deep need to feel safe and heard to in our ever growing, disconnected, and busy society. People are hungry for connection and long for a sense of peace. Storytelling used to be the way of community life but because of technical advancement and the high speed pace of modern life it has become a lost art. Most of the circles I facilitate are based on or patterned after the Native American traditional council circle practices. The Native council circles were sacred ceremonies designed to build and

maintain the community. Christina Baldwin, renowned circle facilitator, supports the use and value of practicing circle work in the Native way. “Through the process of revalidating the circle, we make thirty-thousand years of council wisdom available to others,” (Baldwin, Calling 38). The Native way offers opportunities for problem solving, decision making, allowing each voice to be heard equally and listening for the highest good. Through this process the ultimate voice of the ancestors becomes a focus for the entire community to share whole-heartedly. Storytelling is the heart and soul of these circle gatherings.

Creating sacred space and setting agreements or guidelines with buy-in from all participants is important in order to set a foundation for comfort and safety. A few practices, though not identical, contain common threads that bind all of the circles together. One is actually sitting in a circle shape so we all have eye contact. The circle promotes awareness that everyone in the circle is equal, included, welcomed and heard. For example, in the school setting, we ask the teachers and administrators to allow the students to address them by their first name during the circle. We speak of the intention for listening and speaking from the heart in all of the different circle settings.

Another component is creating a ritual setting, so attendees are aware that this gathering is something different from a typical meeting. All of the circle processes I facilitate use a talking piece to promote active listening. A talking piece is any object that is agreed upon and passed around to facilitate one person speaking while others are listening. In addition each group establishes agreed upon guidelines for appropriate behavior and safety, which encourages the elements of storytelling and deep listening. The intention of creating community and building relationships is a fundamental purpose of

circle gatherings. Personal growth through introspection and awareness of others is often experienced as well. Kay Pranis, Author and highly acclaimed Circle Facilitator states:

Another ancient teaching foundation for Circles is that human experience has mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects. All of these aspects of human experience are equally important and offer essential gifts to our collective life. Balance among these aspects is important for the health of individuals and communities. Consequently, Circles intentionally create a space in which all of these aspects of human experience are recognized and welcomed. (Pranis 29)

A well-known aspect of all group work is that in order for groups to grow intimately, an agreed upon set of “ground rules” must be stated and adhered to by all participants. As facilitator I attend to the grounding of the circle first, then establish or remind the group about guidelines or agreements. After introducing the talking piece, one way of initiating the circle is to first ask each person to share from their heart what they need to feel safe and how they will agree to communicate in the circle while sharing their personal stories. Only the person holding the talking piece will speak while the others are listening.

Some typical guidelines agreed to for safety in a circle are:

- 1) CONFIDENTIALTY (I capitalize this because it is always on the list and is the most needed and important aspect for safe relationship building and group comfort.)
- 2) Be non-judgmental.
- 3) No gossip, what ever gets said in the circle stays in the circle.
- 4) Be honest, tell the truth, and speak from the heart.
- 5) Listen with the ears of your heart.
- 6) Be lean in speech or succinct in your speaking, say what you need and take the time to really explore what you are offering, but remember everyone wants an equal opportunity to be heard.
- 7) Allow silence to be your guide. When you get the talking piece pause... listen inside, so you aren't spending all of the time while others are speaking to prepare and being distracted ...in the quiet, what arises in you may be different than what you originally thought when the question was asked. After hearing what others have shared you may need to listen internally before you embark on your journey of speaking your truth.

- 8) Talking piece and its function, no speaking unless you have the talking piece. No cross talk or banter.
- 9) All are equal in the circle.

Other guidelines that come up in school settings are: no making fun of or laughing at others, be nice, take risks, have humor, stay in the circle, and no violence or cursing.

After establishing guidelines, the circle is now ready to co-operate as a respectful and functional group. The facilitator usually starts off modeling the way in which questions will be answered, using “I messages” with details that flesh out the story succinctly. For the rest of the session, in keeping with native tradition, each time the talking piece goes around the circle it is passed to the left or clockwise, the direction of the earth’s daily rotation when viewed from the south pole. For each question a new person picks up the talking piece of their choosing to begin their story and personal exploration of their current truth, and belief or experience related to the inquiry topic asked of the whole group.

Once the circle forms, anticipation, curiosity, trepidation and excitement about what is expected and the unknown mystery about where we will go together are emotions the participants may possibly experience after arriving (especially for the first time). The first question asked, helps participants get to know one another and acts as an ice breaker. I prefer to think of it as a bonding question. ” The first question might be: “How are you feeling in this moment?” with suggested reference to their Peace Circle attendance.

All of these components assist in assuring that Peace Circles are a safe, fun, and inspiring time for participants to share life experiences and personal growth in a comfortable and nurturing environment.

Peace Circle Facilitator's Role

Over the past five years, I've completed trainings in several modalities of circle work that are applicable for different settings. The various influences and methods of these modalities have provided me different skill sets to design appropriate circles for each group or situation. The precious pearls of wisdom I received from each one of these trainings has helped expand my creativity and proficiency, assisted in developing my own personal style of facilitation and led to my curiosity regarding the connectivity of Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles.

I began offering Peace Circles as a way for me to realize my own life-long desire for healthy community and sustainable relationship building. When I was exposed to the council circle process thirty-some years ago it felt like a respectful, honest, and honoring way of being with others. We passed a staff, spoke prayers and dreams around a campfire or in a sweat lodge. Since the 1970's, I have only periodically been in situations where people choose to gather with this similar intention, observing interconnection and depth. I have continually longed for more.

In the early nineties I started dancing weekly with small and large groups of people at the Dances of Universal Peace. Initially the dances fulfilled a longing I had for spiritual connection. Yet I noticed I continued to long for a deeper sense of interconnection. A few years later I was introduced to the *Circles of Ten* circle process and instantly found something that resonated with the call. This process supported the direction in which I wanted to focus my world work. *Circles of Ten* includes spiritual, psychological, and emotional components to peace and community building that inspired me then and continues to inspire me to share a similar process today.

I decided to take facilitator training with *Circles of Ten, Women for World Peace* while I was involved with the six-week *Buddhist Peacekeeper* circle. Shortly after this time I read a newspaper article about the school peace circles and after one phone call I was included and attending them as a community member. The rest is history (her story).

As with Spiritual Direction, the Peace Circle is initiated in my heart before anyone enters the room: sometimes hours, sometime minutes. I am always conscious of using some sort of grounding and connection practice to awaken inner awareness or attunement for focusing on the sacred presence. The ritual of preparation depends on the type of group that I will be conducting. Similar to Spiritual Direction, I spend time energetically cleansing (energy hygiene) and preparing the space for participants to enter an obviously reverent environment ready for this special time which they have gifted themselves.

Physical preparation for commencement of a circle includes creation of the “sacred space” with altar items set as a focal point representing the sacred circle. In the native traditions the focus was the fire, however in my home or other meeting space it is always an altar cloth and a candle lit from generations of the Peace Flame along with several chosen talking pieces to be passed around during the circle. Other items such as a singing bowl are used to create ambience. The space is cleared of distraction yet includes and welcomes inspirational items brought by participants. The intention for trusting the circle process is set.

As a new group is gathering, I remain alert to each person’s energy needing to be held, allowing the unknown mystery of their personal sovereignty, past history, comfort in group settings, curiosity and desire to explore peace in a safe yet unfamiliar container (which I am aware might be challenging for some).

Collected and set nearby are inspirational readings, exercises, or focusing games, (the latter is for children's circles where distractions from potential monotony of answering questions and listening intently could arise). The circle is a chance to explore the expanded connection of the internal self and others through storytelling and sharing of personal experiences. The inclusion of readings or exercises (initiatives or games) provides alternative ways to introduce topics of conversation and exploration.

Except in the case of *Circles of Ten*, I do not prepare the exact questions or readings, I just review possible options. Trusting the guidance of the Circle and the Sacred is the true gift. I open my heart and let the circle be guided where it needs to go. With intention and focus, how could it be any other way? Peace is our agreed upon focus, those who want a spiritual experience and are open and receptive will engage at that level.

As facilitator my role is to help create a safe and comfortable space for all. The hope is that any fear or possible resistance a participant brings will be alleviated once a feeling of trust, safety, and connection is felt. If people arrive in an open-hearted and open-minded state the fear usually goes away quickly and transparency occurs. Since the facilitator is an active participant in these circles as well, it takes a certain level of trust on my part to show up and also stay observant of the whole.

To pay attention in a circle as in improvising music is to know when to come in and when to solo, and when to provide back-up with a listening heart. Playing together as equals takes practice and patience. (Shinoda Bolen 46)

When the group is seated, the candle is lit, usually the singing bowl is rung and we ask for silence to be observed. With the intention of energy cleansing, the facilitator will suggest and guide the group through a breathing practice, such as taking three deep breaths in and sighing out loud, asking anything that is left from the day and whatever

occurred prior to arriving, be released. Everyone grounds in the present moment and asks for wisdom and greater inner knowing to be a guide.

The group is attuned to the here and now (present moment) and we begin our journey together. In the on-going groups if someone is missing our meeting we acknowledge their absence and allow their non-physical presence to be with us. If appropriate we ask our ancestors to be present and guide us in our time together. When that is too overtly spiritual (as in school settings) we may ask, “If you could bring someone into this group to be with you today, who has either passed away or is still alive who would it be and why?” acknowledging a potential need for safety and comfort for the participant.

Observance of Outcomes

Having had the privilege of facilitating dozens of Peace Circles over the past five years, I have observed their many benefits, giving me hope and keeping me interested and passionate about this work. The following statements demonstrate how circles have a profound impact on participants:

Being in Circle is a learning and growing experience that draws upon the wisdom and experience, commitment and courage of each person in it (Shinoda Bolen 15).

It’s like throwing pebbles in a pond, each one has an impact and an effect with concentric rings of change rippling out and affecting other relationships (Shinoda Bolen 16).

Deep within the human mind there is fascination with the circle because it satisfies some longing within us. It is one of the most universal and ancient shapes in the universe. Reality often seems to express itself in this form. The earth is a circle and even time itself seems to have a circular nature (O’Donohue 162).

The experiences I witness while facilitating each of these varying types of circles are deeply rewarding and phenomenal. I am privileged to see how all ages and stages of life benefit from circle processes. At the elementary age (8-9 years old), relationships with friends are the ultimate testing ground for the students' larger world integration. This age group has much to explore interrelationally and having the unique opportunity to speak and learn how to effectively verbalize appreciation, gratitude, grievances or hurts without interruption is extremely life affirming for the kids. The circles allow them to share what they are feel and need. A majority of the kids look forward to this classroom ritual time and share such reflections as: "I like feeling like I have friends who care about me and that I am liked by others." Isn't this something that most of us long for?

In Middle or High School since we only have one full school day together, a lot is packed into a six-hour period. The group is usually no larger than 20 including students, staff and faculty. When students are properly prepared and willing, exploration of deep emotional, spiritual, psychological, and physical issues often occur. By the end of the day in our closing sharing many feelings of connection are revealed. Students express that they felt heard and were surprised by how hearing others made them realize they did not actually know others as well as they assumed. The openness of the circle helped them to look at life from someone else's perspective or awareness which otherwise they would never have thought about. They learn that sharing helped them to feel closer to others and they hope these new friends would at least say "hey" in the halls and maybe even create opportunities to "hang out" sometime. Another significant result of the process is the creation of self-awareness and the obvious removal of blocks, prejudices and barriers that

students do not even know they have. I equate this to the resourced (meaning calm and peaceful) experience ideally achieved before closing a Spiritual Direction session.

If we are peaceful we are happy, we can smile and everyone in our family, our entire society, will benefit from our peace. (Hanh xiv)

Furthermore, the students identify that the circles might possibly be used in other settings in their lives as a tool for creating an environment of understanding and community building.

The larger *Community Peace Circles* have similar format and outcomes as the school circles, however they bring together a more diverse population to learn from one another. These circles focus on acceptance, inclusivity and appreciation of differences.

The *Circles of Ten* and *TLC Circles* are six-week groups for adults to focus on peacemaking and peacekeeping in their daily lives. Some people see how the connection of focusing on peace can be helpful in bringing them to a newly found or recommitted relationship with the Divine. A Spiritual director who also attended Peace Circles, commented about the focus on peace instead of God in the circles, which revealed the very nature of why I offer circles to the public:

When we use common or non-threatening language (Not using the God word for instance), we remember we all want peace and love. If we put our attention on what we want it grows. We can all get to the same place (or have our needs met) without having to call it God or to name it at all.
(Shelly)

These circles offer participants the opportunity to define what peace is, in their own terms. They look for peace and find it more when they learn about their own personal definition of peace. I often hear about how sharing their exploration of peace gives them a sense of comfort, because expressing themselves genuinely and with more confidence and integrity, is unusual and feels good. And I hear how listening to others experience or

define peace gives them more tools to access, just in the simple act of witnessing the path of peace with others. As Thich Nhat Hanh so profoundly states:

When we are in touch with the refreshing and healing elements within ourselves and around us, we learn how to cherish and protect those things and make them grow. These elements of peace are available to us anytime. (Hanh 12)

The six-week experience of focusing on peace, and truly noticing its existence in our daily consciousness and outer world, jumpstarts our ability to continue using this practice beyond the six-week cycle. “Practicing mindfulness in each moment of our daily lives, we can cultivate our own Peace.” (Hanh 99)

“Why are you attending a Peace Circle?” is a question we regularly explore at the beginning of the *TLC Peace Circle*. Participants’ responses to all inquiries are often the jewels that are learned from and retained. One woman responded, that in this phase of her life (“older and more selfish”) she wants to look at how her actions affect others. She is aware that relationships help us get back to a peaceful state and we need our relationships to feel peaceful inside. For her, sharing time with people in circle helped to find that place of peace again, thus she felt more confident in the world. She expressed that because she was in a safe space with the group, she felt her growth.

A common response to the inquiry, “Peace for me would be,” is a feeling of connection and a longing to feel others reach out toward them. For those experiencing deaths, job loss, feeling alone in the world, or good friends moving away, participants were hoping not to lose more connections. They longed for community and connection.

The resounding answer to “How I make peace in the world” was “through communication done well.” Communication helps build bridges and done poorly puts up walls. In times when people experience feelings of separation and disconnection, I have

heard participants express that the circle provides a wonderful opportunity to be in a safe place, to deeply listen and be heard. In addition they have expressed that they take this learning of listening and paying more attention out into everyday life. It helps them make more connections with new people.

In answer to the question “What do you do to get to a peaceful place?” responses were: meditation, centering prayer, walks in the mountains, baths, and talking with friends. One group even added the response forgiveness, the act of making peace with self and others. That evening the circle discussed the topic of forgiveness in depth and related it to the timeliness of the week of Yom Kippur. People shared rituals they have used to practice forgiveness such as atonement.

In concluding one six-week *TLC Peace Circle* I asked the circle attendees if they would answer a few questions regarding their experience of the circle and how it has or has not affected them spiritually. With their permission, I include a few of the pertinent responses:

The circle did strengthen my connection with the sacred NOW, by strengthening my practice of acceptance and of attending to the present moment. Yes! I find it impossible to experience the sacred without inner peace.
(Lucero)

Having recently spent a day with Kay Pranis who was talking about circle work bringing out the “best self”, I found this next comment from Linda, a Peace Circle participant, particularly fascinating:

Yes, I now think about personal peace almost every day. If I am out of peace on my “Peace Meter” I stop and come up with ways to get back to my “Best Zone.” Having a deep sense of Peace and an experience of the divine are one and the same, “Be still and know that I am GOD.” (Linda)
(Saftler, TLC)

These comments illustrate how Peace Circles affect the participants and their sense of the Sacred in the Peace Circle experience. The responses written above are just a few of the great examples of the transformative and profound experiences people share about their Peace Circle experience.

I believe that for Interspiritual seekers, Peace Circles are Sanghas - community of enlightened ones, reliable friends on the path of Dharma (Definition from, “What to Expect in Buddhist Spiritual Direction.”) (Taylor 46) If people are looking for connection and long for internal peace, coming together to explore life issues and find some resolve or resourced place from which to operate can potentially offer a spiritual growth experience for participants. As a facilitator I listen to participants and through the art of inquiry, bearing witness, and holding space my Spiritual Direction skills are constantly optimized.

Chapter IV

Elements of Group Spiritual Direction found in Peace Circles

Many people desire a felt sense of God connection and/or internal peace. Both Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles can fulfill this need or longing desired by participants. In this chapter, I will demonstrate the similarities and differences of a longing and call to attend Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles, comparing and contrasting elements that are used in both settings.

In our culture, people wish for an internal experience of peace much like the longing described by those desiring to feel God's presence, to know God, or to have mystical experiences of the Divine. In Peace Circles I have heard participants express the desire to be relieved of suffering and wish to experience a feeling of consolation they once had and want to be infused with again.

As Christina Baldwin so eloquently states:

Peace of mind is the cornerstone of Spiritual life. It is the tabula rasa, the clean slate, upon which messages of spiritual guidance may be written. The only way I can receive these messages is to hold myself in a quiet, receptive state I call peace of mind. (Seven 9)

This peace of mind is where all spiritual direction starts, and to keep finding our way, we need to keep returning to this state of calm mind and open heart.
(Seven 10)

In addition, Baldwin quotes William Blake, Peace of mind is a spiritual state waiting for us to find it. (Seven 11)

These statements encapsulate the essence of this paper and serve as a foundation for this chapter.

Although not a new phenomenon, having awareness, or longing for something (which may or may not be known) is prevalent at this time in our history. Some people express it in terms of longing for God or other names for the Divine, others are just longing for the sense of belonging, connectedness, or peace of mind and serenity. Many are looking to make sense of the crazy world that feels out of control and others just need to feel like they are being heard and seen, bringing them to a resourced place and helping them feel internally peaceful.

As people have the support of others, their attention is easily brought back to their desired focus. Is it God? Is it peace? Coming together to share longings for and experiences of peace and/or God reverses a sense of isolation and separation that so many feel when they are alone. When a group commits to meet for a specified period of time, the connection is sustained between meetings and the participants feel continually supported. This type of relationship building brings about internal feelings of peace and well being and often leads to a spiritual connection. “Relationships are at the heart of authentic spirituality and anything that embraces relationship is going to move us more toward the holy.” (Whisten quoting McCarthy 19)

Experiences of a Spiritual nature do not have to be in connection with any religious or dogmatic structure to fulfill the longing and feel connected. “Spiritual practice is any activity that both awakens the desire for, and provides the means to expand consciousness of self, other and the Larger Mystery.” (Zimmerman and Coyle 6) Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles are powerful paths for spiritual growth.

Oftentimes and unfortunately, fear leads one to search for a sense of peace or connection to God. With war as a daily threat and violence so rampant and graphically

displayed in the media twenty-four hours a day, many people are living with constant feelings of fear. These circumstances create a hunger in people to help, fix, change, make a difference, or serve others in some way. Unfortunately many people do not know how, nor do they have the necessary tools like good communication skills or community building skills to activate their goals. Yet their compassionate nature is stirred and longs for expression. Some people have a strong faith in God, and others do not. Either way many yearn to feel more peaceful internally and amidst their community, work place and family. Peace Circles help the emergence of the human soul and illuminate personal sovereignty while encouraging and supporting sacred action.

I often have the privilege of witnessing how Peace Circles organically stimulate a “call” or spark an awareness of spiritual awakening or rebirth in a participant’s daily life without ever using the word God. Even if the call to attend a circle is in the guise of peace, the practice can foster an unintentional awakening and attunement to the sacred connection with all. Several individuals in the Peace Circles have returned to long avoided, yet desired spiritual practices. One woman, a long-term Buddhist meditation practitioner, fell away from her practice because of conflict with the personalities in her sangha. After participating in the six-week Peace Circle, she felt re-energized, returned to her practices and found a new sangha. Another Peace Circle participant who grew up in the Jewish faith, expressed that she had not been able to find a synagogue or other community to meet her needs despite her search for something inspiring. She shared that as a result of the Peace Circle, she began church hopping and discovered that the Unity Church fulfilled her needs. She wanted a continued sense of peaceful support and was delighted that Unity provided the sense of the Sacred too.

The simple, powerful, inclusive, and non-dogmatic terminology of Peace Circles offers seekers the reunion of their connection to the Sacred without controlling their beliefs, which many experienced in the churches they were raised in and fled from. This support provides a cradle for the attendees to share their current spiritual readings with the group including Eckhardt Tolle, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hahn, Rumi and various other teachers and mystics.

The primary intention of the Peace Circles I facilitate is to help people explore their longing to know, experience, and deeply feel the often illusive sense of peace. These circles are an opportunity to explore and define internal and external resources that nurture a sense of peace in ones heart. People often describe their relationship with the Sacred, God, Almighty, Holy Spirit, the Divine as a renewed sense of hope and possibility that sometimes feels so intangible or ineffable. Christina Baldwin beautifully explains how our society is coming back to a place of being open to hearing others' stories. She asserts that sharing stories is a way of learning to be more compassionate with one another, which leads to being less judgmental. "Less judgment equals more peace," it helps open our hearts, and "supports good physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health" (Baldwin, Seven Whispers 89).

Integral Elements Common to Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circle

Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles utilize similar practices and tools. This section will define and explore: holding sacred space and observance of silence, the practice of deep listening and storytelling, defining guidelines and agreements, questioning and the art of inquiry, discernment, and resourcing.

Sacred space and silence

Both Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles offer participants a process of internal exploration in a safe environment. The term often used is “holding sacred space.” In the Claritas Interspiritual Mentorship Training Program, Janet Quinn defined holding sacred space in several ways: being with another, allowing the mystery to reveal, vesting authority in the individual client not the external “expert,” and being receptive and graceful. The opposite inappropriate approach would involve: problem solving, getting it done, or having an agenda, and leading which are all usually more stressful and intense. In Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles the facilitator remains open, receptive and trusting of the circle to reveal whatever is alive in the moment. “A circle that is trustworthy has a spiritual center and a respect for boundaries.” (Shinoda Bolen 16)

Silence is a practice encouraged in both settings, because it allows the mystery to unfold. For some, silence is easy and comfortable. For others learning to accept silence may take practice. Circle work is usually attractive to those who are more extroverted than introverted.

Extroverts benefit by cultivating silence. Interior quiet encourages listening to God. We are more likely to hear the guidance and support that we need. (Reeves 18)

Learning to be quiet and hold space in a group is an extremely powerful practice, especially for those who are more gregarious. Peace Circles are designed to allow for more talking than Spiritual Direction groups, so those who are spiritually oriented and appreciate introspective time would likely choose a Spiritual Direction group over the Peace Circles if given a choice.

Knowing the benefits of silence for internal focusing, I incorporate silence at the beginning of each Peace Circle and suggest it as needed between sharings. Silence between sharings may be used as a grounding tool for the person preparing to share with the group. The silence also allows those listening the opportunity to notice any internal judgments or blocks that might prevent listening from the compassionate place of their hearts. In our closing time a silent meditation might be included. Otherwise the circle is closed with a non-religious prayer, poem or reading.

A key element of Group Spiritual Direction is commonly described as the space between the words or the internal exploration that may include a sensory or vibrational experience. Taking time to sit in silence is the gift and power of Spiritual Direction both for the directee and the director creating the space to “read between the lines,” or to be in that place of no longer and not yet. Silence is the ultimate expression of being in the now or present moment. Ann Kline discusses how in Spiritual Direction God speaks to us in our own voices about the details of our daily lives and loves to challenge us but we must be quiet enough to listen (Dougherty, Lived 81). Often in Spiritual Direction the director suggests a time of silence to the directee as a chance to listen introspectively. A quote from the Lorian Spiritual Direction class on “Silence” expresses this idea well, “The awareness that comes from a grounding in silence allows us to respond more authentically.” (Suzanne Fageol-Lorian 40)

Another essential element acknowledged in both settings is the importance of creating sacred space. Appropriate ritual objects such as an altar cloth, candle and other specific altar-pieces (of non-religious nature in Peace Circle settings) also contribute to building a sacred container. These objects remind the participants that the session is not a

therapy or chat time rather a time set aside for the divine/peaceful relationship to be explored and encouraged.

Deep Listening and Storytelling

Storytelling assumes someone is listening while someone else is sharing from their own personal experience. Participants of Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles witness themselves and hear others share stories that offer lessons of the heart and self-discovery, often providing an awakening to a deeper sense of personal and communal awareness. By holding space for others to explore internally in an agreed upon ritualistic format, these groups offer participants opportunities to learn the art of deep listening, to witness others, and to learn about themselves. The format is designed so that only one person speaks at a time and without interruption. In Spiritual Direction the agreed upon format is that one person shares at a time while others hold the space in silence. After the speaker feels complete, the listeners are given an opportunity to share their reflections on what they heard. Peace Circles use the ancient tool of the talking piece to regulate this agreement.

In my Spiritual Direction brochure one caption reads “Mystery Loves Company.” I coined this phrase because what I see over and over again is that people love to share their inquiries and stories. When a participant has others witness their internal processes and insights that person has the experience of being held in the arms of another, encouraging individual spiritual growth and peaceful states. In the act of personal storytelling a demystifying quality occurs and valuable lessons are learned.

Storytelling is one way of discovering, understanding, and processing our internal experiences. Storytelling over the course of history was a way for nations and tribes to

continue keeping their heritage and customs alive. People often imagine they are alone on a journey. However, when they have opportunities to tell their stories and listen to others, they realize that their paths are more alike than different. They feel held as they risk sharing in a safe environment. Both Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles aspire to offer this safe container for their participants.

In Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles each person is given an opportunity to speak deeply from their heart about that which is alive and moving in their lives or whatever they are inspired to reveal. In Spiritual Direction, the speaker is held in a sacred container while sharing then receives reflective feedback from others. The feedback received in the silent time may give the speaker some perspective, guidance, or non-verbal caring. This same designed time is not inherent in Peace Circles but can take place if agreed to by participants.

People long to experience the peaceful place within. Having a chance to hear the sacred voice of their interior ponderings in addition to the larger community's expressions provides a sense of connectedness and often elicits an experience of peace. Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles similarly provide an opportunity for participants to choose Sacred Listening with the ears of the heart, and to ask the self, God and/or the whole community to hold them as they explore the mystery. I have personally experienced and have heard others express, "I learn what I am thinking and feeling when I have the opportunity to hear what I am speaking and/or rereading what I have written." The tool of journaling is encouraged in both Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles as another great story-telling vehicle. People often bring their journals to the circles help them flesh out their stories.

Deep listening, from the heart, is a key component for the facilitator/director and individuals in Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles. Everyone must focus on listening without judgment, noticing what opinions are theirs and are not someone else's. Individuals must pay close attention to notice if their minds wander while others are speaking. Being mindful is developed through practice. Deep listening allows people to be more honest with themselves and to listen for inner guidance. This Quaker quote speaks well to the art of listening, "To listen a soul into disclosure and discovery is the greatest service one human being can give to another" (Garfield, Spring and Cahill 94). The Quakers use silence and deep listening as their primary spiritual practice.

Deep listening from the heart, witnessing, and having the chance to tell our story is not the norm in this culture. In Spiritual Direction deep listening is the norm. In speaking about Spiritual Direction, Rosemary Dougherty relays that each person has a chance to tell their story, talk about issues, ask questions and listen. Having witnesses for spiritual guidance helps, for sometimes the lesson or "aha" moment comes from hearing how other people handle their life issues (Lived 29). This same experience occurs during closure in the Peace Circles and is frequently appreciated.

Spiritual Direction (for those who want to explore their life with God) or Peace Circles (for those who may or may not choose that path) both offer the gift of being heard, in whichever preferred setting is chosen.

In a way, not to be heard is not to exist. This can be the plight of the very young and the very old, the very sick and the "confused" and all too frequently the dying, literally no one in their lives have the time or patience to listen. (Guenther 143)

Many religions speak to the importance of taking time to listen. One of the most sacred Jewish prayers (Deuteronomy 6:4) is Shema which is Hebrew for "Hear the One."

In Islam and Sufism, one of the 99 names of God is Ya Sami, which means “The All Hearing” in Arabic. The 12th century Persian poet Hafiz describes the importance of deep listening beautifully:

How do I listen?
As if everyone were my master,
Speaking to me His cherished last words”
Hafiz -The Gift

Many spiritual traditions like Buddhism and Hinduism encourage meditation to become quiet enough to listen. Contemplative Christians meditate as well. Father Thomas Keating and Thomas Merton experienced and taught forms of meditation such as Centering Prayer, as a way to quiet the mind and find peace.

Agreements and Guidelines

At the beginning of a private or group process, establishing agreements and guidelines is essential for a person to feel safe and be able to trust. People need clarity and definition when engaging in a new endeavor. Having written and/or spoken agreements, guidelines, and code of ethics statements are a way of offering a commitment to confidentiality and securing relative safety and openness to the process.

Several common guidelines or agreements are declared in both Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circle settings. The most important issue is confidentiality. Without confidentiality the creation of trust is difficult and depth is often missing. Speaking and listening from the heart is another valuable guideline so that people feel heard and cared for in their personal explorations. Allowing silence is also a common agreement used as a tool for introspection and reflection. In addition, the participants need to be aware that more is going on in the session than that which is spoken.

In the Buddhist Peace Keeper Circles I attended, the Three Tenants of Buddhist Thought were integral components that all participants of the circle agreed to weekly. They are: Bearing Witness, Sitting in the place of “not-knowing,” or “unknowing,” and Loving Action through Holy Listening. These are very similar to agreements used in Spiritual Direction, where we explore the mystery of our connection to Spirit while listening with all of our attention, then speaking and knowing we are being held and heard by the group and director.

In Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles, stating agreements between participants and directors/facilitators is imperative. Without agreed upon guidelines, relationships are hindered and become detrimental to the healthy functioning of this intimate personal connection. Although these guidelines are discussed and mutually decided upon at the beginning of all Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles, reviewing them periodically is beneficial for the sake of memory and reciprocity.

Questioning and Inquiry

The book Wisdom Circles asserts that self-exploration through the art of inquiry stimulates inner guidance. The authors explained that when we are anchored by our inner reality and visions and values we come to know our spiritual home (193). “It is a spirit of inquiry that eschews dogmatism and honors many paths” (235). This quote accurately reflects the philosophy of Peace Circles.

Suzanne Fageol, faculty member of the Lorian Spiritual Direction program, suggests that there are three essential elements in the art of asking questions. First, the questions need to be specific or unambiguous. Second, the question ought to be simple rather than compound. Third, they should be direct and relevant to the issue being

explored. The art of inquiry takes practice. I find that in both Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles questions are designed to be open-ended, without specific direction or implication. The intent behind questions is not to probe but to stimulate a more personal type of inquiry. These are questions that encourage one to think, reflect, and express from a deeply personal perspective. They are meant to provoke thoughtful, truthful, and detailed answers promoting understand of others. In Peace circles the facilitator asking the question is the first to answer, providing a role model for others to respond with depth and offering food for thought in the process.

In both Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles a question is meant for the directee/participant to explore their reactions, intentions, emotions, sensations, and experiences. The depth of and disclosure in the reply depend on the speaker's comfort and willingness. The question is just a suggestive tool and should not be judged as a good or bad question because of the answer it solicits.

Discernment

People seeking Spiritual Direction or peace utilize the process of discernment to go within for insight. The process is described in many ways. A definition from Janet Quinn from the Claritas Interspiritual Mentorship Training Program: Discernment is making choices from your "God Self." The Lorian Soul Friending program offered a more in depth definition, stating:

The process of discernment is a focusing on skills that connect our understanding of the Sacred in ourselves and the world to the issues we meet through our lives in order to translate our deepest values into actions. Being able to make choices in our lives from a perspective of authenticity and alignment with self and the world is an extension of establishing the ground of being in the sacred. (Lorian, Fageol 2)

According to Eckhart Tolle, “Discernment is peaceful, if it’s agitating it’s not a conscious decision” (Tolle Session 8). In Tolle’s language, the words “conscious or consciousness” might be interpreted as God. Finally, Denis Edwards states:

Confirming a decision in prayer, placing it before God and testing to see whether it leads to peace in God is the final element of the cognitive discernment process. (Edwards 23).

For me, the essence of discernment at its best is finding the place where the head and heart meet and proceeding from a resourced (comfortable, calm or peaceful) place toward that purpose, aware that the course may change as needed.

In Peace Circles the facilitator uses the discernment process to guide the circle. As with Group Spiritual Direction, the path in Peace Circles is not predetermined and thus requires constant, conscious observation to guide but not dictate its course, since it always depends on the sharing of the participants/directees in the moment. The flow of the circle requires head and heart of the facilitator/director to be aware of the subtleties and unspoken needs of the group.

The Restorative Justice circles use discernment as a fundamental tool for healing harm by creating awareness of the whole picture. In reference to St. Ignatius of Loyola’s three invitations of God in discerning right action, Edwards writes:

The third time requiring a person who is peaceful to use cognitive approaches to decision making weighing out advantages and disadvantages. So if God’s call isn’t so clear or the person is pulled in obvious directions making decisions because of the directions they’ve gone or chosen to go, a viable alternative is to use a place of center, focus and peace (a resourced state), to weigh out the movement. (Edwards 23)

This quote describes exactly what the ideal goal of a Restorative Justice circle outcome would be. Once a person is feeling safe or resourced they can make a conscious choice as to how they would now like to act in light of the newfound wisdom.

As is true with Spiritual Direction, when people are in a decision-making inquiry, Peace Circle facilitators encourage discernment by frequently asking, “Does this lead you to a place of feeling free and peaceful?” Not all discernments stem from an obvious spiritual inquiry. The topic of discernment often elicits discussion of consolation and desolation. Edward’s writes about the Spiritual exercises (par 316) of Ignatius of Loyola where he defines consolation and desolation.

Consolation leads us to a place of interior peace, spiritual joy, hope, faith and love. (par. 317-318) Desolation leads to darkness, turmoil, laziness, tepidity, and a lack of faith, hope and love. (24)

Edward’s also talks about times of desolation not being the best time to make big changes (taken directly from Ignatius Spiritual exercises) (par. 318).

In desolation we are easily misled into a path that is not of God. All the good decisions of our life seem under attack. We experience turmoil and lack of peace. (25)

This reference reinforces the need to access the resourced place of peace so decisions flow with more ease and grace.

Many times when people find themselves in a place lacking peace they experience the feeling of abandonment of God and others. This experience is commonly referred to as a “Dark Night of the Soul.” A seeker might feel abandoned by God, however once consoled, the person finds peace in God’s presence again or for the first time. Being in a peaceful state does not always lead one to God but sometimes given time and healing, finding God may be one outcome. This is often a good time to ask, “Do I find peace or God in this decision, change or movement in my life?”

Rosemary Dougherty discusses people’s comfort with the group discernment process:

They may forget that in group Spiritual Direction one's understanding of discernment is enhanced not only through articulating one's story and hearing a word from another, but also through hearing the stories of others and listening to what arises in their prayer as they hear others. (Dougherty, Group 66)

In Peace Circles, discernment is used whether one is aware or not of God's presence in the process. Often times a person shares a situation where they are less than peaceful in how they are experiencing their world or relationships. They often long for a more conscious, comfortable or creative solution to their situation. They find themselves needing to resolve or find a resourced place to allow the right timing for decisions or actions to take place. With the help of others as witnesses to "hold" and demonstrate caring, and as role models sharing their personal journeys, individuals often get to a place of peace in their own perfect time. When in a place of discernment, the circle keepers help participants ask their own questions, as is done in Spiritual Direction.

The Peace Circle process often exposes participants' values and their religious, spiritual or faith orientations. The following potent responses from high school students, when asked to share their favorite quotes, support this idea:

- I walk by faith and not by sight "religion."
 - People have one thing in common: they are all different.
 - He/she who plants the seed beneath the sod and waits to see believes in God.
 - Religion means be the best you can be.
 - Be the living expression of God's kindness: kindness in your eyes, in your smile and in your face. (Mother Teresa)
 - Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.
 - Give it to God and he'll take care of you.
 - Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them humanity cannot survive. (14th Dalai Lama)
 - I can do anything through Christ who gives me strength.
 - God calls us to the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.
- (Fort Collins High School Peace Circle)

The use of values clarification in Spiritual Direction is a common practice in aiding the discernment process. In Spiritual Direction sessions a focus on values is usually part of at least one session. Exploring values helps directees look at whether they are living within their own moral belief system along the spiritual journey. Although the God quality of peace begins internally, only when the external is explored through work such as values clarification are people able to acknowledge and release or let go, and have an experience of freedom from self-imposed suffering. In Peace Circles, values clarification helps to raise awareness of similarities among the participants and the values on which they base their lives, such as “treat others as you wish to be treated.”

Resourcing

When a person is “resourced” meaning being in a place of comfort, safety, relaxation, and internal peacefulness (consolation), they can more readily touch the sacred from that peaceful place than if turmoil or chaos (desolation) takes over their consciousness. When a participant arrives at a private or Group Spiritual Direction session and is out of sorts or in conflict or desolation they often spend the whole session storytelling about this situation of discomfort. An effective Spiritual Director will assist the person in finding a place of ease, relaxation, comfort and calm before completing the session so the individual can function and relate to the world before leaving the safe environment with the Spiritual Director.

In the High School and Community Peace Circles, after practice with less emotionally charged inquiries, the group is often ready to explore and share some of their deep emotional issues. They may share stories that are hard and touch tender places. In this situation the facilitator may offer inquiry to lighten up the discussion, which offers

support to the participants. An example of a resourcing question is, “When you have situations that arise and are hard to deal with, what do you do to calm yourself? Or when you are angry what is something you usually do to deflate the anger?” During a Peace Circle with junior high students, one young man asked me if he could ask a question about funny things. When he was given the opportunity to pose the question to the group he asked, “If you find yourself in a bad place that you know is unsafe what do you do to calm yourself down?” I was shocked and delighted at the switch he made from wanting to lighten things up with “funny” to asking a very insightful question of his peers. Helping explore what each person did to “resource” themselves in these very chaotic, confusing, and intense situations.

Several times over the course of six weeks, the *TLC* circles explore participant’s current definitions of Peace. People use these definitions as a place to return, to resource themselves when needed or feeling less than peaceful. In one *TLC* Peace circle participants gave me permission to include their definitions of peace:

Peace is an inner sense of calm and serenity, an outer sense of communion and sweet connection, a world in harmony. (Polly)

Peace is soft calm easy passionate loving, in the moment awareness. It is warm and fuzzy, sweet, relaxing, embracing of all. It is conversations with loved ones where I feel seen and heard. (Tiffany)

Peace is living acceptance. (Rick)

Peace is walking a mountain trail, the smell after a spring rain, contentment. (Linda)

Peace starts within each individual. We are conditioned to use our mind and not our heart, but the mind was designed to be a servant of the heart. Being still and listening creates a flow to life and ultimately a sense of peacefulness. Developing a relationship with one’s self, one’s own soul...getting to know who we really are, a limitless being of light and love, we can then have fuller and peaceful relationships with others.

Awakening to our own connection to peace enables us to walk in the world as peace itself. (Caryll)

Peace is when every one hears one another, not just through the ears but with the heart. Peace is when a story is shared and not judged. It is when you learn about others and it enriches one self. Peace is when you learn to communicate to others, through words, hands, body and soul. Once these elements are accomplished, the world will be at peace. Everyone will learn to appreciate one another. Everyone will learn to become allies with others. The world will become partners of one another. The world will be like people holding hands with strangers in forming a perfect circle. There is no beginning and no end. (Chris)
(Saftler, TLC)

The above quotes demonstrate how participants find the resourced place to live and move from in their daily lives. Clearly, how people come to a peaceful state is diverse, unique and variable. Many definitions of peace have a subtle spiritual component and yet often do not refer to God.

Being a Group Spiritual Director in the Peace Circle Setting

As I began facilitating Peace Circles I noticed how the language of Spiritual Direction was consistent with that of Peace Circles. This consistency is apparent in both the smaller TLC circles and in the larger groups with adults, elementary, junior, and high school age students. I have also witnessed through the wisdom of individual participants that the language used to describe their experience with God, spirituality, or the mystery correlated with the essence of experiencing resounding peace. Although this work attracts many people already on a spiritual path, even those who were not on this path have had some sort of outcome where they were able to sense a sacred comfort in the process of internal peace exploration and inquiry.

The role of a Spiritual Director in a group setting is comparable to that of a Peace Circle Facilitator. In both circumstances the guide shows up as a midwife (one who assists

in the birthing) for a directee or participant to explore what is alive in the present moment and listen to what arises given an inquiry of soul nature. Many times I have been blessed to witness how a state of deep peace often elicits an experience of the Sacred. In both settings, preparing the inner and external space for the directees and participants as described in Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circle chapters is essential. The first priority is to hold sacred space for the mystery to be explored whether described in the terms of God or peace. As Christina Baldwin states, “Circle itself becomes a spiritual practice – a celebration with others of the beauty and wisdom of living the sacred life.” (Calling 55)

Group Spiritual Directors and Peace Circle Facilitators must also recognize the need to remain in full attentiveness to “not-knowing,” remembering always to get out of the way and trust the process. Oscar Reed in his Peace Circle trainings often reminds us to “Trust the Circle,” encouraging us to feel safe and comfortable allowing for the unknown and unplanned to occur. (Peace Circle Training). In addition, Directors and Facilitators must recognize that things will arise beyond their knowledge and experience. They must allow what is meant to be the truth for the directee/participant to emerge in its own time and to sit in the acceptance of “not-knowing.” I remind myself to breathe and “Let go and let God.”

Another profound example of how a Spiritual Director in a group session and Peace Circle Facilitator exhibit similar characteristics is demonstrated by how both show up having no attachment to the outcome, trust the process (or “Trust the Circle” as is often stated at the beginning of circle as a guideline), and “go only as fast as the slowest part wants to go.” In other words, “don’t push the river.” If used correctly, these techniques are

good barometers for holding space in both Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles. Holding the energy and creating a safe container while allowing the mystery to reveal or guide the process is quintessential.

A skilled Spiritual Director or Peace Circle Facilitator has the following abilities: having conscious awareness of the group when weaving the next inquiry or when allowing a participant to take the space of tears or silence, listening for what arises, trusting what is a possible path for the whole group, guiding and staying out of the way at the same time, allowing the organic nature of the unknown to occur, always being ready with the skills and tools to assist when needed, and acting like guard rails on the mysterious journey. To prepare for both situations as a director and as a facilitator, I create the sacred space and ask that my Divine connection inspire the process. I recognize how both are opportunities for the soul's longing to be seen, understood, heard, and acknowledged, for it to find meaning and purpose and connection with others.

When peacemaking practices are included in our spiritual practices the potential exists to clear out psychological issues, and this creates more room for a peaceful connection to the Sacred Self and God (if that be the chosen path). Denis Edwards states:

The great mystics are well aware of the psychological nature of many of the impulses that spring from within and of the social pressures that come from without. Knowing that the human mind and heart are complex and consciousness is many layered. (Edwards, 23)

Allowing the wrestling of psychological growth in Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circle situations is acceptable as long as the session does not become a therapy session. Knowing the difference is critical.

While self-disclosure by the therapist is forbidden in the psychotherapy relationship, it is slightly encouraged in the Group Spiritual Direction relationship. In

Peace Circles personal disclosure by the facilitator is of essence because all are equal in the circle. When the facilitator begins by answering the first few questions they help model the types of responses elicited by participants.

The willingness toward self-disclosure is one of the primary distinctions between spiritual direction and psychotherapy, where the mutuality of the former is an essential characteristic of the relationship. (Guenther 35)

Peace Circles necessitate mutuality to an even greater degree than is suggested as acceptable by Guenther, with regard to the to Spiritual Direction relationship. Personal disclosure is required in Peace Circle facilitation to establish equanimity and is also required as a modeling tool.

Contrasting Elements of Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles

In my experience I see only a few contrasts in these two processes. I will address reflection or feedback for the speaker, length of silence, structured format and appropriate sharing by the facilitator.

One obvious difference between Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles is that in Peace Circles reflection or assistance with issues shared in each person's introspective monologue is not given time. In the school and community peace circle setting, the allotted time does not allow for in-depth assistance. Plus working through challenging, emotional, or volatile issues in the context of peers can be inappropriate. Feedback is only offered in the Peace Circle setting if requested by the speaker and is done after everyone else has shared. In the school settings we offer a round with the talking piece to share connections, which can look like feedback or reflection. It is an opportunity to connect with something that touched or affected the listener in some way.

In the typical Spiritual Direction format, silence is built into the process. Silence is suggested between speakers in the Peace Circles but isn't required. Internal reflection time is offered to the participants by the facilitator before the circle commences as a way to arrive fully in the circle with non-distracted attention. It is also a technique used to regroup after a break.

The format is another topic of contrast between the two processes. In some models of Group Spiritual Direction, like the one used at Shalem Institute in Bethesda, MD, the format is a very structured process led by the Spiritual Director.

The Peace Circle format has an intention but no specific map to follow. It is much looser or organic in nature. It requires the facilitator to be open to the natural flow according to the needs of the circle.

The Spiritual Director and Peace Circle Facilitator roles vary to some degree as well. In Group Spiritual Direction the role is to keep everyone on course as it is prescribed in the format. In Peace Circles the facilitator must remain open to the possibility of changing the course of action as variables arise. In Spiritual Direction is it acceptable to share personal experience as seems appropriate but not in any real depth. Many times in Group Spiritual Direction the Director doesn't participate with the group, they only direct the process as described in Rosemary Dougherty's format for group Spiritual Direction. In Peace Circle, the facilitator's role is to draw out profound answers from participants, which requires self-disclosure. Although some differences exist between Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circle processes, overall there are more similarities.

Observations of Outcomes in Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles

The practice of Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles share some similar outcomes: personal growth; community consciousness; deep internal exploration through listening and sharing stories; being a witness for and witnessed by others; and feeling how it is to be held in one's own expression of truth, whether it be through the focus of God or peace.

Peace is an emotion and driving force that has the ability to at least touch if not cross over most boundaries. Most humans long for peace which has the potential to heal anyone who is experiencing separation caused by faith, culture, doctrine, traditional beliefs, or prejudice. As stated earlier, one of the first few questions explored in the TLC Peace Circle is, "What is your definition of peace?" Participants share responses like, hopefulness, comforting feelings and situations, altruistic musings, and dreams of possibilities. Some feel it internally, in each breath or when in silence or meditating. Others experience a sense of peace when feeling the connection to source, oneness with all, in gratitude and acceptance, in a wonderful smell, in a sense of contentment, warmth, or stillness. Others are more aware of peace being in their external environment: in nature, with their pets, with their spouses, in the bathtub, walking on the beach or in the mountains, in visions of holding hands around the globe, and when feeling accepted and seen for who they really are. These situations that stimulate an awareness of peace are similar to those that promote an awareness of God.

The Peace Circle offers the recognition of interdependence. Feeling peaceful inside for many requires some sort of association. A way of feeling connected to something, be it a person, a community, God, a way of life, a philosophy, a teaching, or spiritual practice.

People want to belong, which usually brings about a peaceful feeling within. The word “be-long” is interesting, connoting a longing to BE and having a feeling of being “at home.” Or it is a longing to feel one-ness or we-ness, and a connection to the whole or ONE. “When you are understood you are at home, understanding nourishes belonging” (O’Donohue 14). “The soul is wise and subtle; it recognizes that unity fosters belonging. The soul adores unity” (O’Donohue 118).

Many human beings are looking for a sense of connection and those who are lonely seem to be searching for a way to belong. They want to feel more peaceful inside. For some, finding God gives them a feeling of being deeply connected. A connection to spirit can fill the void of loneliness. For others God is more illusive or unfulfilling and brings about more longing. For some people, Peace Circles offer a similar corporate function as church. They provide fulfillment of the same needs: connection, validation and a safe place to express themselves. Church has traditionally been a way for fostering human connection, providing a place where agreement about forms of worship and common beliefs could be expressed or validated, and for sharing experience. However, some find church does not meet those needs for a variety of reasons.

People long to find a place where they can be authentic, individually seen for who they are and what they believe, a place to explore their humanness and find solace and peace. When “out of peace” mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually and when aware of this state, people are often motivated to want to return to a peaceful place. As director or facilitator I may ask a directee and/or Peace Circle participant to ask themselves, “How am I feeling in this moment?”

The awareness is key. John O’Donahue describes it like this:

All presence depends on consciousness. Where there is a depth of awareness, there is a reverence for presence. Awareness is one of the greatest gifts you can bring to your friendship (15-16).

Conscious practice of awareness of one's state of being in any given moment is the true essence of Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles. The positive outcome of participating in Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles is the same if one is dedicated to the process and to the individual work it requires to explore deeply within.

Chapter V

Incarnational Spirituality

According to author David Spangler, the definition of Incarnational Spirituality

(I.S.) is:

I.S. is a study of the energies and spirit surrounding and informing the process of incarnation, and a practice of deepening into our incarnations for the purpose of more fully expressing our sacredness and our capacities for blessing, service, and co-creativity. (Lorian Web Site: Glossary)

Spangler further states in the on-line class:

I.S. is the art and practice of evoking and using inner resources of energy arising from the act of incarnation itself in order to shape one's life, bless one's world and become a partner with the creative forces of spirit.

I think of it as; ME-ness connected to WE-ness, and All of Us-ness, and the Wholeness of all that exists.

The principals of I.S. addressed in this chapter are: 1) sovereignty, 2) embracing and engaging other, 3) holding, energizing, and imagining, 4) co-creativity and connectedness, 5) cosmos, and 6) coherency and emergence.

Both Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles embody the principals of Incarnational Spirituality without defining or naming them. By encouraging participants to develop and share their innate unique expression in these settings, they become more in touch with the wholeness of their own being. Recognizing their way as being valid they feel empowered to take ownership of this new self-discovery (sovereignty). They have the opportunity to look deeply within and uncover internal longings, which may have been illusive. Once found, they obtain resources to sustain this newly acquired place of peace. Participants are then able to move about more confidently in a worldly sense (embracing and engaging other) enveloping their personal relationships (holding, energizing and

imagining). Seeing that what they want, God also wants for them, (co-creativity and connectedness) allows them to begin engaging with their community. Participants connect beyond this earthly plane (the Cosmos) into experiencing a higher vibrational sense of compassion, and sovereignty. Finally, as they engage in their world work, human relationships, and/or service to humanity (coherency and emergence) participants feel more grounded in themselves as related to God. Spangler says:

The whole objective of Incarnational Spirituality is to learn to understand and “control” (“I use the term “inhabit”) this space-changing, space-creating ability in ways that will bless and positively affect the space of the world (the incarnation of the world) around us.
(Spangler, I.S. on-line class 17)

Peace Circles have exactly the same objective. In my experience people interested in circle work, especially as facilitators, not only want to improve their own life but also that of others in the circle and the world around them. Given the opportunity to touch some personal element of the sacred, the whole circle flourishes. Cheryl O’Shell, a colleague, peace circle trainer and facilitator, shared her experience after a personal melt down. She felt the circle wasn’t going well, they weren’t engaging as she hoped, so when they took a break, she took a moment, went outside to regroup internally and received the inspiration she needed to carry on. She chose to share her experience and open dialogue with the group as it reconvened. This led to a deeper investment for most of the participants, as it became more genuine and engaging.

In circle, participants often express a desire to find a place of comfort or peace within and relationally with the human family. Circles have been known to assist in developing a sense of personal empowerment that opens one up to healthy involvement in community. Many people are so isolated in our society and have lost a sense of connection

that they either secretly or overtly long for. Circles provide ways to connect to self, other, and the sacred presence.

Council circles in the traditional Native Way were held around the fire where the voices of the whole tribe were solicited and respected, offering strength to the community. Tribes held council for many reasons: to solve problems, discuss issues, celebrate rites of passage, ritualize gatherings, and memorialize and show respect to those who accomplished tasks or passed on. Council circles offered each individual a sense of empowerment. Participants spoke their truth and were listened to without interruption or judgment. Council circles and Group Spiritual Direction contain most of the same elements of Incarnational Spirituality.

When humans feel personally empowered and are really heard, they are more likely to feel whole and a part of the greater whole. Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles offer a unique opportunity for people to experience the gift of being listened to and seen for who they truly are. In the Peace Circles I facilitate I ask, “How has the circle affected you as a participant?” Cimmeron responded:

I was able to explore my true feelings out loud without judgment or solution from others. This helped me feel empowered to dig deeper inside myself, to inquire and explore my true feelings, emotions, desires, and reactions. I was able to hear what I needed to hear without interference or interruption, which helped me to better understand myself and my relations. (Saftler, TLC)

For some people the response is a feeling of connection to God. Others talk about having a sense of connection to their soul, their human family, their jobs, the world, and nature. These responses perfectly exemplify how being in a fully sovereign state can lead to embracing connectiveness and emergence as described in Incarnational Spirituality terms.

Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles both potentially offer this resourced state and a sense of personal sovereignty without ever defining it as such.

Peace Circles can also provide an environment for helping people find meaning and purpose in their lives.

We see the process of development as an individual – finding your own unique sense of meaning in life – enhanced by participation in circles and connecting with your own inner guidance and expression of the thought and feeling. (Garfield, Spring and Cahill 38)

An integral aspect of I.S. is becoming fully incarnated and moving forward from that place. Psychiatrist Arthur Coleman states:

We functionally define individuation as a process of becoming fully and wholly oneself without compromise to society, yet there is a sense that as an individual grows in the direction, he or she becomes more conscious and involved with the surrounding world. This is a model of an individuated person: someone who serves him or herself and the group from a place of self-knowledge. Without knowledge and acceptance of the group as part and parcel of one's identity, there is no service and no individuation. (Garfield, Spring and Cahill 92)

This quote defines how one thrives when living fully into their incarnation and how the group processes such as Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles can support them.

When I explored how Incarnational Spirituality impacted Peace Circle participants and how they engaged in the world once the newly discovered sovereign place was illuminated, I noticed it most obviously in School Peace Circles. This engagement was apparent after encouraging the students to state how they would take this new discovery about themselves and the heartwarming experience of community back into their daily lives. Incredible revelations and creative brainstorming were shared in the circle, students felt a deep sense of empowerment. They begin sharing suggestions like random acts of kindness, being nicer to everyone, cleaning up our planet by picking up trash, and driving

less often. They then extended beyond themselves and thought of offering help to homeless, disabled, elderly or those who seem to be alone. The circles ignited in the students a new awareness and consciousness about engaging in and embracing the community and the world.

The following comment accurately describes the movement that so often happens in circle:

It is a paradox of the circle that the more we are bonded as a group, the more important our contributions as individuals become. (Garfield, Spring and Cahill 129)

This paradox is often revealed in the circles as comfort levels and trust are established. People learn from hearing how others view the world. Tolerance, appreciation, and acceptance occur when people hold one another and are energized by the connection. Group Spiritual Direction has a similar effect when bonding occurs and intercessory prayer (prayer for others) is offered.

This applicable quote from the book Wisdom Circles demonstrates how in circle, when a person feels a sense of personal sovereignty, it can lead to exploring their ability to partner with other creative forces:

Circles help us to calm our inner authority, a place to give voice to the inner authority as an antidote to relinquishing our power and complying with the beliefs and agendas of others. (236)

David Spangler defines sovereignty as the “essence of our sum or presence of our sacredness, identity, self, individuality and soul as manifested in our physical incarnation” (39). In addition, Wisdom Circles shows how circle work helps us to move from being separate and isolated to seeing ourselves connected to a multi-cultural global community, helping each other to improve the functioning of the whole (237). In the School Peace Circle a closure inquiry is asked of participants, “Describe how the circle has affected you

today.” Comments such as, “I feel I’ve made some new friends that otherwise would never have happened” and “I want to share this type of connection with my friends and family so we can get to know each other better and really be there for each other,” are commonly expressed and are affirming for both facilitator and participant. Once comfort in one’s self, (a sovereign state) is established, the directee can explore relationship with others in the group spiritual direction setting.

Awareness on the part of the Director or Facilitator about holding the space for the directees’ process to organically unfold is essential. In an online class discussion relating Spiritual Direction to Incarnational Spirituality Suzanne Fageol, Spiritual Director and faculty of Lorian Association related that:

Classical Spiritual Direction speaks of the Directors need to “get out of the way” and let Spirit do the work. From the I.S. perspective we are the Sacred, or represent the Sacred in human form, so really Director and Spirit are “holding” the directee. (on-line class).

As Director in Spiritual Direction and Facilitator in Peace Circles, I have learned to stay tuned, receptive, and aware of the connection with spirit that is always in me, around me, and acting through me. I sense the co-creativity and coherence, and attempt to bring forth that which is organically emerging.

Although Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles utilize different vocabulary than I.S., the concepts of Incarnational Spirituality are inherent in both settings.

Awareness of this fact helps the director and facilitator illuminate these qualities for participants and supports a consciousness of personal sovereignty.

Conclusion

The Inter-connectedness of: Group Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles

This thesis began by looking at how the longing for God and peace are similar and how the longing can lead individuals who are hearing the call to attend a group in which they have the opportunity to share the experience and personal depth of that longing. I defined Spiritual Direction and its particular application known as Group Spiritual Direction and various styles of Peace Circles, comparing the elements of both, which illustrated how they are more similar than different in eventual outcome. Then I provided an in-depth overview of each experience and how they both relate to Incarnational Spirituality. This conclusion will summarize findings and explain my personal call to continue this much needed work in the world. Using my skills as a Spiritual Director and my knowledge of Group Spiritual Direction, I plan to continue facilitating Peace Circles and calling them “Peace Circles” to offer this heart connecting practice to those who are not attracted to a group called “Group Spiritual Direction”.

For many people, past association with religion has led to a feeling of separation rather than of unity, creating a resistance to or distaste for more religiously oriented concepts such as God, Holy Spirit, or Higher Power. The concept of peace is neutral and inclusive, offering a gentle invitation to explore internally. When allowed to experience a state of peace, the experience of longing for a deeper connection or a sense that something greater than self exists often arises. Most people are looking for connection with something, call it “God” or call it “Peace.” Allowing individuals to rest in the resourced place which fits with their personal journey and beliefs helps them to feel this connection.

Peace Circle work has the ability to open channels to experience interconnectedness, interrelatedness, and inclusivity. For many individuals a palpable awakening occurs when given the opportunity to explore and share stories in a non-threatening safe group setting, while listening to others and also being heard. The human heart is exposed and the longing for more is sparked tangibly.

Many spiritual groups see “loving action” or “interbeingness,” a term used by Thich Nhat Hahn (95), as a fundamental way to connect with the Sacred. Peace is an outward extension of the internal self and a great focus for sacred action. Peace Circles are a way to engage in this Loving Action, also referred to as Service in Action. Oftentimes sharing outward expression of internal processes is a way to embrace and feel the presence of Spirit. Hearing their neighbors’ stories helps individuals open a compassionate heart toward those who see this world differently. Peace Circles offer a safe place to explore one’s own and listen to others’ beliefs.

In her article, Nancy Reeves believes people are guided to the type of spiritual practice that meets their needs and life circumstances (15). She supports the idea that extroverted people, like myself, choose spiritual community over being a Holy Hermit (12-13). Those who gravitate to circle work are usually willing to open up and share their personal journey. Since I was a young child I always loved asking questions and hearing others’ stories. I felt exhilarated by the experience. When I facilitate Peace Circles in any format, I continue to feel this enjoyment. In the six-week circles, hearing others speak of their peaceful awareness during the week between meetings brings me a sense of peace and Godly awareness, as if God is affirming, “what you are offering is so needed, keep going.” In circles people share stories that bring them realizations regarding their real

feelings about life, family, career, joy, and fear. Sometimes participants bring more overtly spiritual topics into the circle. In the closing of one circle, a participant described a feeling of ecstasy and divine connection, “I feel very peaceful and filled with the sacred, something bigger than little ME.” People often make references to God, faith, and feelings of a sense of belonging in the circles; feelings that people do not always get to express or even notice in their everyday lives.

Peace begins within the individual and then easily radiates out to the world through “visionary social activism,” a term I use to mean having an internal vision supported by a connection with source, then providing service to the world, from that resourced place of peace.

I have witnessed remarkable outcomes in Spiritual Direction and Peace Circles. Through compassionate listening and self-reflection, personal sovereignty is experienced. With suspension of disharmony and recognition of an internal awareness of hope, in alignment with the Sacred and/or peaceful place inside, participants and directees gain new tools for creative modes of personal expression. Through positive communication and optimism, new open-hearted relationships are built.

In her Presence article, Dolores Johnanson McAdams discovered this about herself:

I plan to utilize my training as a spiritual director through my present ministry in the classroom as a public high school teacher, through the concept of restorative practices that encourage reconciliation, restitution and restoration. (24)

I resonate with Delores’ description of her chosen world work. Although I am not a teacher I offer Peace Circles in the public schools to elementary, middle, and high school students as a preventative, community building tool and restorative practice. I am grateful

for all of the Spiritual Direction tools that offer me the confidence and support for guiding the human soul toward finding a place of solace and peace.

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I was fortunate to be performing my passionate work in the world, sharing Spiritual Direction and facilitating Peace Circles. This situation enabled me to draw directly from personal experience, as Director and Facilitator while formulating my ideas. Illuminating similarities and differences between these two forms of companioning, and documenting this valuable path for others' education has been truly rewarding. By sharing my experience with the processes and delicately documenting a deeply personal reflection of my own journey, I hope to encourage others to listen for the "call" even when it arrives outside of the traditional box of Spiritual Direction.

Appendix I

Biblical References

Psalm 37:37 - Mark the perfect Man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is Peace. (HB, 885)

Psalm 37:37 - Look at those who are honest and good for wonderful future awaits those who love peace. (HOB, 551)

Proverb 12:20 - Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counselors of peace is joy. (HB, 980)

Proverb 12:20 - Deceit fills hearts that are plotted evil, joy fills hearts that are planning peace. (HOB, 626)

Mark 9:5 - Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves and have peace on with another. (HB, 1468)

Mark 9:5 - Salt is good for seasoning. But if it loses its flavor how do you make it salty again? You must have the qualities of salt among yourselves and live in peace with each other. (HOB, 988)

James 3:17-18 (17) - From the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (18) And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. (HB, 1777)

James 3:17-18 (17) - but the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times. And willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. (18) and those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness. (HOB, 1224)

Appendix II

Kiri Saftler's brochure for Spiritual Direction

What is Spiritual Companionship with a Soul Friend?

Attuning ourselves to be instruments of God, Goddess, Holy Spirit (whatever name you are comfortable with) listening for divine essence while sitting in silence stillness and prayer.

We are two listening for the third

Being witness, holding space and tending to the voice of God through Holy listening without judgment or attachment to solution or outcome. Reflecting as a mirror while the companion uses tools such as spiritual inquiry, felt sense and heart centered practices to discover one's own true nature.

The heart is our access to universal consciousness

Coming together to explore personal transformation and to see through the veils of illusion to the divine truth of who we are right here and right now. The sacred time to be seen for who we are...Intimacy (IN TO ME SEE)

I look at God, I look at you, I keep looking at God

Discernment, getting in touch with the soul's deepest desire in this mysterious journey called life, uncovering what the soul is longing to express authentically. WE open to the Spirit of Guidance and the grace of God when we honor, trust and appreciate the mystery

Thy will be done. The trick of life is not to be in the know but to BE in the mystery

(Saftler –Brochure)

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