**Tending to Spirit Covenant Group**

**Topic: Compassion Date: 2/22/2022**

**Adapted from: UU SGM Network Adapted by: Michael Field**

**Group Business:**

**Lighting the Chalice / Chime / Silence/ Chime**

**Opening Words:**

“The first duty of love is to listen.” – Paul Tillich

**Check-in (Share from your mind and heart):**

**Topic Introduction:**

The UU First Principle calls us to “covenant to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person.” In this era, defined by its divisions not its dreams, it requires compassion to even see the worth and dignity of those on the other side of the divide, or those outside the circle, the Other. The dictionary says that ‘compassion’ is the “sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others.” This makes compassion the antonym for ‘schadenfreude’ or taking pleasure in the misfortunes of others.

There is a synonym for compassion which is germane to our discussion: ‘fellow feeling’ which is defined as “sympathy and fellowship existing between people based on shared experiences or feelings.” It is very easy to identify shared experiences for those who are in our tribe, but how hard should it be to see that those not in our tribe have shared feelings? From fellow feeling for the Other, one feels compassion and, from there, summons the humanity to promote the inherent worth and dignity of the Other.

Compassion is the basis of the Golden Rule which exists in some form in every major religion. One reason for this is that compassion grows from our own pain; it is personal pain that is the shared feeling that joins all of us with a shared experience. To develop true compassion, the ability to care about the cares of others, one must develop self-compassion. It is not good to be selfish, but neither is it good to be selfless; one must be self-aware and self-caring to be compassionate.

**Quotes:**

“The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves.”

Council of Conscience, *Charter of Compassion*

“I ….hope you will have just enough pain to learn compassion.”

Chief Justice John Roberts

“Compassion means to come close to the one who suffers…A compassionate person says, ‘I am your brother; I am your sister; I am human, fragile, and mortal, just like you…We can be with the Other only when the other ceases to be Other and becomes like us.”

Henri Nowen, Dutch Catholic priest, professor, writer, and theologian

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

Albert Einstein

“When we come into contact with the other person, our thoughts and actions should express our mind of compassion, even if that person says and does things that are not easy to accept. We practice in this way until we see clearly that our love is not contingent upon the other person being lovable.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

“To the degree that we look clearly and compassionately at ourselves, we feel confident and fearless about looking into someone else’s eyes.”

Pema Chödrön, American Tibetan Buddhist and ordained nun

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. When have you demonstrated compassion for a stranger? When, if ever, has a stranger acted out compassion for you?
2. When, in your life or in the life of a loved one, have you or they yearned for compassion? Who, if anyone, attempted to fill that need for compassion, and what form did take?
3. In the midst of challenge, people have different approaches. How do you show your need for compassion and care (seek advice/support, withdraw, cry, avoid the issue, lash out, etc.)? Do you show compassion in the same way you seek it?
4. When you need compassion, what kind of support is best for you (hugs, being listened to, having some space, receiving a written note or card, problem-solving, etc.)?
5. Can you think of times you have been a recipient of compassion (for example, someone knowing/responding to you in a way that you felt authentically acknowledged your suffering or need)? Have you or could you do the same for the Other?
6. Do you practice compassion for self? How hard or easy is this for you? What are some good things about self-compassion?

**Sharing thoughts on topic / Deep Listening:**

**Open Discussion on topic:**

**Likes & Wishes:**

**Closing Words / Chalice Extinguishing / Next Leader:**

“True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it understands that an edifice that produces beggars needs restructuring.”

Martin Luther King Jr.