



Circles of Grace

Respectful & faith based conversations

Facilitating Circles of Grace

Jesus was born into the midst of a broken world held captive by fear. Throughout his ministry, Jesus extended the love and presence of God deep into the chaos of his world, because God claims all people as His beloved children. He taught us that the Kingdom of God was in our midst and that reality changes the way we live with and engage other people. The *Circles of Grace* is an invitation to all of us to consider how we can engage the broken chaos of our world with and through the incarnated love of Jesus Christ. Our communities are broken and crying out for healing. What does it mean for the church to present a witness and presence that gives testimony to the presence of God's Kingdom in our midst instead of perpetuating the power of evil that seeks to divide and dehumanize? We invite you to enter into this conversation to explore how Christ is calling you to be a transformative witness within our current reality.

Guiding Values

As you shape your "Circle of Grace," we encourage you to be intentional about incorporating diverse people and perspectives. Diversity includes and extends beyond race and ethnicity. Below are some examples of how you could intentionally create a diverse "Circle of Grace."

1. Who are people in your community you could invite to participate? Are there community and neighborhood leaders?
2. How can you include teens and young adults?
3. Consider people with differing theological and political perspectives.
4. Are there co-workers you could invite into the conversation?
5. When considering people to invite, think about those who are respectful of differing opinions and perspectives but are also able to speak their own truth.
6. When considering people to invite, think about those who are willing to be vulnerable and will not be quick to judge others.

Creating the Space

You will be inviting people into a sacred space where individuals have the possibility of hearing each other and the voice of God. Consider hosting your "Circle of Grace" in a home. Intentionally integrate warm welcome and hospitality. Plan on a 2-3 hour block of time.

Framework for Convening a Circle of Grace

1. Begin with introductions. Explain the process of Mutual Invitation (to prepare yourself as a facilitator, we have created a webinar that explains Mutual Invitation. You can go to www.westohioumc.org/mutual) and practice it while doing introductions. Consider asking people to share why it was important for them to participate in this conversation.
2. Explain the Respectful Guidelines (to prepare yourself as a facilitator, we have created a webinar that explains the RESPECT Guidelines. You can go to www.westohioumc.org/respect). Ask everyone if they are willing to covenant to abide by the Respectful Guidelines through the Circle of Grace process.
3. Select one of the Sacred Texts below and lead a "Community Bible Study." We have prepared a webinar that shows how this Bible Study is led at www.westohioumc.org/bible. Read the selected text three times. During the first reading, participants listen or a word, phrase or image. During the second reading, participants reflect on what this text says about engaging the pain of others. For the third reading, participants reflect on what the text calls them to do, be or change. (More information is on the website at www.westohioumc.org/circles)
 - a. I Corinthians 12:12-26 (One body with many members)
 - b. Romans 8:18-25 (Waiting for the revealing of the children of God)
 - c. Luke 1: 46-55 (Mary's Magnificat)
 - d. II Corinthians 5:16-21 (God has given us the ministry of reconciliation)
 - e. Baptismal Vows (" On behalf of the whole church, I ask you: Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin? Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?")
4. Facilitate a process of sharing, using Mutual Invitation, to engage the following questions. *(These questions are rooted in Wesley's small group process.)*
 - a. Who is God?
 - b. Who am I?
 - c. How would you talk about the current reality around race in this country?
 - d. How, then, do we understand who God calls us to be as a community in the midst of this reality?
 - e. At the end of the conversation, bless and affirm each person and their participation. Ask each person to share, using Mutual Invitation, "Would you be willing to continuing the conversation and to explore how we can be a healing presence within our congregation and community?"

Ready to start your Circle of Grace? **Sign up here** (www.westohioumc.org/circles)

We will be in touch with you to support your journey and hear your reflections on the process.