



Touchstones Project

Small Group Discussion Guide

Interdependence

Preparation: (Read *Touchstones* and the questions.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “The indigenous understanding has its basis of spirituality in a recognition of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living things, a holistic and balanced view of the world. All things are bound together. All things connect. What happens to the Earth happens to the children of the earth. Humankind has not woven the web of life; we are but one thread. ‘Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.’” *Rebecca Adamson*

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake), adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the following wisdom story.

Sustaining the Tree of Life by Rev. Lynn Gardner, edited for length

The tree stood in the middle of the village.

Its trunk ...took six people holding hands to reach around it. The roots were strong..., and its branches spread out over the village square, offering shelter from the rain, or shade from the summer sun. Its fruit was juicy, sweet, and plentiful.

The people of the village loved the tree. Children played beneath it.... Young people ...whispered ...dreams to the tree.... People ...proclaimed their love ...for one another beneath its branches.... The tree had been witness to so much, and when the breezes blew through the leaves, one could hear echoes of generations: laughter, conversations, dreams, prayers, and songs.

Animals loved the tree, too. Rabbits lived in burrows under the roots, squirrels and monkeys lived in the branches, and bats and birds flew in to eat the abundant fruit. The tree seemed to buzz with life!

One day, a traveling merchant arrived in the village. He rested in the shade and ate two pieces of delicious fruit. “This fruit is incredible,” he said. “I would like to have some to sell in the next villages that I visit. Who owns this tree?”

“No one owns this tree,” replied a villager. “If anything, we belong to it.”

“Well, then, if no one owns the tree, ...no one will mind if I pick the fruit,” said the merchant, and began to fill a basket.

“I mind,” said the villager, “and today I am the keeper of the tree.”

“We each take our turn being here with the tree. We could never own it. We are here as protectors, as sustainers.”

“That’s ridiculous. This tree doesn’t need you! You could just take what you need; take what you want. The tree will continue.”

...“Sir, this tree isn’t like that. We don’t come

here to take from it ...even though we receive much. We are keepers of the tree because this is where we are nourished. This is where some of our most precious memories are, and where our people have dreamed. This is where we remember who we want to become.”

“Well,” said the merchant, “you may think this tree is very special, but it still doesn’t need you to sit with it....”

“Ah,” replied the villager. “The tree itself may not need me—but what of others who come by? Just this morning I sat with a woman whose heart was heavy with worry. ...And this afternoon, a tired couple came by, and they rested with me. They said they had been looking for a place like this. And then an elder came by, and we watched the birds in the branches....”

“And now you are here. You were confused about what this tree is, and how to be with it. Imagine if you had arrived and not found anyone here to talk with? You might have continued thinking that everything you do is all about you. Luckily for you, my friend, I’m here to let you know that when you care for the tree of life, it becomes about so much more than just you.”

And the merchant sat for a while in the shade, thinking about these ideas that felt new and a little challenging. As the sun went down, he picked up his bag and headed out of town, whistling a song that he hadn’t thought of in years. On his way, he shared a smile with each person he met, his heart feeling strangely light and joyful.

And the people of the village? They continued to sustain the tree of life: to care for one another and to share their gifts, with grace and gratitude.

Source:

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/story/sustaining-tree-life>

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

“Gratitude awakens us to the truth of our

interdependent nature.” Haemin Sunim

“The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another, and all involved in one another.”

Thomas Merton

“I believe that dialogue is the key to breaking through our tendency to separate and isolate. Dialogue changes isolation and loneliness into connection and interdependence.”

Vinessa Shaw

“The idea of interdependence is central to Buddhism, which holds that all things come into being through the mutual interactions of various causes and conditions.”

Daisaku Ikeda

“In the progress of personality, first comes a declaration of independence, then a recognition of interdependence.”

Henry Van Dyke

Interdependence is a fact, it’s not an opinion.”

Peter Coyote

“Life doesn’t make any sense without interdependence. We need each other, and the sooner we learn that, the better for us all.”

Erik Erikson

“We know from science that nothing in the universe exists as an isolated or independent entity.”

Margaret J. Wheatley

“When will we learn, when will the people of the world get up and say, Enough is enough. ...We are not made for an exclusive self-sufficiency but for interdependence, and we break the law of our being at our peril.”

Desmond Tutu

“Collective wisdom is about our capacity to recognize interdependence and to make decisions demonstrating that we have a stake in each other, that we can indeed care for each other and the physical planet we share.”

Alan Briskin

“...We now realize as we have never before our interdependence on each other; that we cannot merely take, but we must be willing to sacrifice for the good of a common discipline, because without such discipline, no progress is made, no leadership becomes effective.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. ...Any man`s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” John Donne

“America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire. Given our interdependence, any world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will inevitably fail.” Barack Obama

“Ego`s trick is to make us lose sight of our interdependence. ...In reality we all depend on each other and we have to help each other.” Gelek Rimpoche

“Only by restoring the broken connections can we be healed. Connection is health.” Wendell Berry

“I am part of the sun as my eye is part of me. That I am part of the earth my feet know perfectly, and my blood is part of the sea. There is not any part of me that is alone and absolute except my mind, and we shall find that the mind has no existence by itself, it is only the glitter of the sun on the surfaces of the water.”

D. H. Lawrence

“The further human society drifts away from nature, the less we understand interdependence.” Peter Senge

“In America we have a Declaration of Independence, but our history, our advancements, our global strength all point to an American declaration of interdependence.” Cory Booker

“Interdependence is a fundamental law of nature.” Dalai Lama

“My life is not my own business.” Anthony Hopkins

“...the core values that underpin sustainable development—interdependence, empathy, equity, personal responsibility and intergenerational justice—are the only foundation upon which any viable vision of a better world can possibly be constructed.”

Jonathon Porritt

“We`re either going to be driven to a whole new sense of radical interdependence where we are, in the Bible`s words, our neighbor`s keeper, or destroy ourselves.” John Shelby Spong

“...Depending on others ...gives people a chance to serve. ...I`m not so much big on independence, as I am on interdependence. ...I`m talking about giving people the opportunity to practice love with its sleeves rolled up.” Joni Eareckson Tada

“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.” John Muir

“We are all connected; To each other, biologically. To the earth, chemically. To the rest of the universe atomically.” Neil deGrasse Tyson

“Interdependence is not a slogan, it`s a fact. And our independence as individuals depends on our interdependence with others.” Thích Nhất Hạnh

“Interdependence is unity of diversity. It`s the way the whole of life operates.” Elisabet Sahtouris

“All life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny.” Martin Luther King Jr.

“We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads, and along these sympathetic fibers, our actions run as causes and return to us as results.”

Herman Melville

“The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.”

William Shakespeare

“None of us can ever save himself; we are the instruments of one another’s salvation, and only by the hope that we give to others do we lift ourselves out of the darkness into light.” Dean Koontz

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.... This is the inter-related structure of reality.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. What does being dependent versus independent mean to you?
2. What does interdependence mean and how does it impact your daily life?
3. Consider the role of interdependence in personal relationships, such as friendships, family, and romantic partnerships. How does it impact these connections? How can it be strengthened?
4. In what ways can the Beloved Community

cultivate interdependence? What can get in the way?

5. How can interdependence be a source of strength, resilience, and hope in times of crisis or disaster? Are there specific examples that come to mind?
6. How would you describe your relationship with the Earth?
7. What does the interdependent web of all existence mean to you?
8. What encourages/sanctions human domination of the Earth? How can activism counter this?
9. What are your concerns about environmental destruction & global warming?
10. In the face of despair about what is happening to the Earth, what gives you hope and/or what could give you hope?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person for the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice (Elizabeth Selle Jones)
We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*