

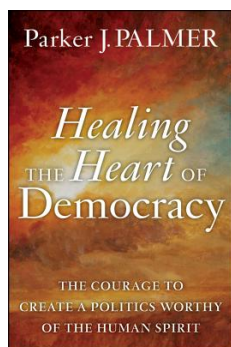
## Season of Civility

Are you weary of the increasing polarization in our public discourse at the very time we need government leadership to address our biggest problems?

You can help begin a different kind of conversation in our congregations and communities. We should neither remain silent nor go along with the prevailing bitterness in our politics. We must create “safe spaces” for respectful conversations across the partisan divides. And we must move beyond the walls of our congregations include everyone in our local communities in this dialogue.

In 2012, the Wisconsin Council of Churches, the Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee and other partners sponsored a “Season of Civility.” Read on to learn about this initiative and to find resources to help your congregation promote civil conversations in your community.

### Parker Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*



In [Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit](#), Parker Palmer sees a valuable role for faith communities in renewing our civic life. The Season of Civility Project used the book as a departure point for constructively addressing our differences, and for helping Wisconsin’s religious community take the lead in modeling a more faithful and life-giving manner of civil discourse.

#### Discussion Guide for Congregations

You can practice and develop the skills for civil conversation in your congregation. [The Center for Courage and Renewal](#) has produced “Healing Democracy Action Circles Guide,” a six-session discussion guide on based on Parker Palmer’s book. The Wisconsin Council of Churches, Interfaith Council of Greater Milwaukee, and other partnering groups, have prepared supplements for using the Guide in faith communities.

The Guide explores each of five “habits of the heart” that are essential for sustaining a healthy democracy:

- An understanding that we are all in this together;
- An appreciation of the value of ‘otherness’;
- An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways;
- A sense of personal voice and agency; and
- A capacity to create community.

(See also [“Habits of the Heart for Healthy Congregations.”](#))

The faith community supplements connect these habits with appropriate religious texts and teachings. Please use the feedback form to let us know how you used these resources, and how your discussions went.

### The Call for a Season of Civility in Wisconsin

**Thirty-six regional and statewide religious leaders** called upon the citizens of our state to enter a “Season of Civility” amidst the partisan rancor of the recall campaigns and the divisiveness of the 2012 elections. Read the full statement [here](#) along with a full list of signatories.

#### Media coverage

[Capital Times \(Madison\) article](#) on Season of Civility launch.

[Wisconsin State Journal article](#) on services of reconciliation in Madison.

Hear Wisconsin Public Radio’s [Kathleen Dunn interview WCC Executive Director Scott Anderson](#) about the Season of Civility project.

Download the *Healing Democracy Action Circles Study Guide* [here](#).

- See a convenient [list of links to audio, video, and text discussion starters](#) mentioned in the study guide.

Download Faith Community Supplements to the Study Guide below:

- [Baha'i](#)
- [Buddhist](#)
- [Christian](#)
- [Islamic](#)
- [Jewish](#)
- [Unitarian Universalist](#)

## Sermons on Civility

The WCC invited pastors throughout Wisconsin to submit their sermons on the topic of civility. To view the current list of downloadable sermons, click [here](#). To submit a sermon, send a copy in electronic format (either Word or pdf) contact [Lori Denoyer](#).

## Season of Civility Bulletin Insert

Every election year is an appropriate time to call for a civility in pub. Your congregation can print the Season of Civility statement in its newsletter or include it in the worship bulletin, and post a link on its website and FaceBook page. The statement can be downloaded for your newsletter in [Word format](#) or as a bulletin insert [in PDF format](#).

The Session of Tippecanoe Church, Milwaukee, WI developed a civility guideline to be placed ahead of prayer time in worship with the intention of supporting civil involvement in their faith community during the election season. You can [download a Word Document](#) with a version of the guideline that can be edited for your church (at the points highlighted in yellow). Print it as an insert or copy it into your worship bulletin or newsletter as a helpful resource for your community.

## Additional Resources on Civility

For a list of books and websites, click [here](#).

[Fond du Lac clergy leaders join Season of Civility effort.](#)

More good press on the Council's Season of Civility initiative from [Capital Times](#) editorial writer [Phil Haslanger](#).

Parker Palmer column on the Huffington Post, "[A Season of Civility: Religion and Public Life](#)."

["A Season of Civility in Response to Campaign Incivility,"](#) by Brian Konkel, Co-Pastor of Lake Edge Lutheran Church, Madison, WI, on the "God's Politics" blog of [Sojourners](#).



## “Habits of the Heart” For Healthy Congregations with Parker Palmer



We live in a time of deep divisions and polarization, both within the church and in the wider culture. Now more than ever, church leaders are called to embrace the healing and reconciling work of Christ as we seek to build healthy congregations that can engage their differences in more faithful, life-giving ways. What most of us lack are the tools to actually do it.

Pastors and lay leaders throughout Wisconsin are invited to explore, through the use of small group discussion resources below, Parker Palmer’s five “*Habits of the Heart*” – tools and methods for building bridges across our differences and building up the body of Christ:

- An understanding that we are all in this together;
- An appreciation for the value of “otherness;”
- An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways;
- A sense of personal voice and agency; and
- A capacity to create community.

The small group discussion resource, below is designed for six sessions, and could be used with a clergy support group, local church council meetings, or with an adult study group in local congregations, to name just a few options. The intent is to develop new skills to apply the *Habits of the Heart* to the current challenges and opportunities facing congregations today.

Groups can use Parker Palmer’s book *Healing the Heart of Democracy: Creating a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit* (2nd ed.) as an accompanying resource, but it is not required reading.

The Discussion Guide below was developed by facilitators who are a part of Parker Palmer’s Center for Courage and Renewal, as part of a pilot project for clergy and lay leaders in partnership with the Wisconsin Council of Churches and Edgewood College in Madison, WI.

### Habits of the Heart for Healthy Congregations Resources:

[Download a two page summary of the the Five Habits of the Heart That Help Make Democracy Possible](#)

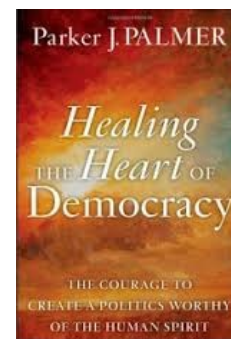
#### Five Habits of the Heart That Help Make Democracy Possible

Adapted from Parker J. Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit* (2011)

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—Terry Tempest Williams

"Habits of the heart" (a phrase coined by Alexis de Tocqueville) are deeply ingrained ways of seeing, being, and responding to life that involve our minds, our emotions, our self-images, our concepts of meaning and purpose. I believe that these five interlocked habits are critical to sustaining a democracy:



**1. An understanding that we are all in this together.** Biologists, ecologists, economists, ethicists and leaders of the great wisdom traditions have all given voice to this theme. Despite our illusions of individualism and national superiority, we humans are a profoundly interconnected species—entwined with one another and with all forms of life, as the global economic and ecological crises reveal in vivid and frightening detail. We must embrace the simple fact that we are dependent upon and accountable to one another, and that includes the stranger, the “alien other.” At the same time, we must save the notion of interdependence from the idealistic excesses that make it an impossible dream. Exhorting people to hold a continual awareness of global, national, or even local interconnectedness is a counsel of perfection that is achievable (if at all) only by the rare saint, one that can only result in self-delusion or defeat. Which leads to a second key habit of the heart...

**2. An appreciation of the value of “otherness.”** It is true that we are all in this together. It is equally true that we spend most of our lives in “tribes” or lifestyle enclaves—and that thinking of the world in terms of “us” and “them” is one of the many limitations of the human mind. The good news is that “us and them” does not have to mean “us versus them.” Instead, it can remind us of the ancient tradition of hospitality to the stranger and give us a chance to translate it into twenty-first century terms. Hospitality rightly understood is premised on the notion that the stranger has much to teach us. It actively invites “otherness” into our lives to make them more expansive, including forms of otherness that seem utterly alien to us. Of course, we will not practice deep hospitality if we do not embrace the creative possibilities inherent in our differences. Which leads to a third key habit of the heart...

**3. An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways.** Our lives are filled with contradictions—from the gap between our aspirations and our behavior, to observations and insights we cannot abide because they run counter to our convictions. If we fail to hold them creatively, these contradictions will shut us down and take us out of the action. But when we allow their tensions to expand our hearts, they can open us to new understandings of ourselves and our world, enhancing our lives and allowing us to enhance the lives of others. We are imperfect and broken beings who inhabit an imperfect and broken world. The genius of the human heart lies in its capacity to use these tensions to generate insight, energy, and new life. Making the most of those gifts requires a fourth key habit of the heart...

**4. A sense of personal voice and agency.** Insight and energy give rise to new life as we speak out and act out our own version of truth, while checking and correcting it against the truths of others. But many of us lack confidence in our own voices and in our power to make a difference. We grow up in educational and religious institutions that treat us as members of an audience instead of actors in a drama, and as a result we become adults who treat politics as a spectator sport. And yet it remains possible for us, young and old alike, to find our voices, learn how to speak them, and know the satisfaction that comes from contributing to positive change—if we have the support of a community. Which leads to a fifth and final habit of the heart...

**5. A capacity to create community.** Without a community, it is nearly impossible to achieve voice: it takes a village to raise a Rosa Parks. Without a community, it is nearly impossible to exercise the “power of one” in a way that allows power to multiply: it took a village to translate Parks’s act of personal integrity into social change. In a mass society like ours, community rarely comes ready-made. But creating community in the places where we live and work does not mean abandoning other parts of our lives to become full-time organizers. The steady companionship of two or three kindred spirits can help us find the courage we need to speak and act as citizens. There are many ways to plant and cultivate the seeds of community in our personal and local lives. We must all become gardeners of community if we want democracy to flourish.

## Discussion Guide for six sessions

[Download a pdf of the Discussion Guide](#)

### 1. Parker Palmer speaks on the role of religion in public life

*Holy listening demands that we engage in listening to discover the presence and activity of God in the joys, struggles, and hopes of the ordinary activities of congregational life, as well as the uncertainty and opportunity of change and transition. Listening is holy because we expect to hear the voice, presence, or absence of God. Holy listening demands vigilance, alertness, openness to others, and the expectation that God will speak through them. Holy listening trusts that the Holy Spirit acts in and through our listening. We discern and discover the wisdom and will of God by listening to one another and to ourselves. —Craig A. Satterlee*

[Watch video](#)

Questions for consideration:

- Do you see your congregation participating in the public life as Parker describes it?
- What are the qualities of religious life and practice that could be brought to the public life?
- Do you experience any intersection of religion and the public life in your current setting? If so, where and how?
- In what ways could or should religious life and practice be explicit in public life?

### 2. Parker outlines his “habits of the heart” from his book, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*.

*“No individual can live alone, no nation can live alone, and anyone who feels that he can live alone is sleeping through a revolution. The world in which we live is geographically one. The challenge that we face today is to make it one in terms of brotherhood....” — Martin Luther King, Jr.*

[Watch Video](#)

Questions for consideration:

- Which habit do you feel you have the most mastery with? What allowed you to develop that habit?
- Which habit is the hardest for you? Where in your experience does this show up the most – personally, in your congregational life, and/or as a member of the larger community?

### 3. Local Madison area clergy and Parker Palmer reflecting on the Habits of the Heart.

*loving your neighbor is all very fine when you have nice neighbors. This is why people choose the town they live in. we all want nice neighbors. It's the folks in the next town who are the bad guys. you'd be amazed at how citified folks hate the people in the suburbs. not the suburbs, the people in them. but would they want us living next door? i ask you.*

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[Listen to the podcast](#)

Thoughts for consideration:

As you listened to the experiences shared on the podcast – the singing of “Sanctuary” in the Dominican Republic, the aspens’ root system – what images or experiences have you had that are powerful expressions of Habit 1:” we are all in this together?”

**4. An Appreciative Eye for Humanity: Parker and Carrie Newcomer discuss her song, “Betty’s Diner”**

*“In Christian tradition, the broken-open heart is virtually indistinguishable from the image of the cross. It was on the cross that God’s heart was broken for the sake of humankind, broken open into a love that Christ’s followers are called to emulate. Even as a physical form, the cross—with arms that stretch left and right and up and down—symbolizes the tension, the “excruciating” tension, that can open the heart to love.*

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*–Parker Palmer, Healing the Heart of Democracy, pp. 149-150.*

[Watch Video](#)

**5. Parker speaks on the importance of his fourth habit – A Sense Of Personal Voice And Agency**

***It Is I Who Must Begin***

*It is I who must begin.*

*Once I begin, once I try—*

*here and now,*

*right where I am,*

*not excusing myself by saying that things*

*would be easier elsewhere,*

*without grand speeches and*

*ostentatious gestures,*

*but all the more persistently*

*—to live in harmony*

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*I am neither the only one,*

*nor the first,*

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upon that road.*

*Whether all is really lost  
or not depends entirely on  
whether or not I am lost.*

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[Watch Video](#)

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*The hardest spiritual work in the world is to love the neighbor as the self—to encounter another human being not as someone you can use, change, fix, help, save, enroll, convince or control, but simply as someone who can spring you from the prison of yourself, if you will allow it.*

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Watch video: <http://vimeo.com/35024729>

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# HEALING DEMOCRACY ACTION CIRCLES GUIDE



# INTRODUCTION

*Welcome!* We couldn't be more thrilled that you've joined what we hope is a fresh, meaningful experiment in reconnecting to our communities and rehumanizing our democracy. We hope that the crew you've assembled will become a provocative and comforting circle for these next six months, challenging you to think more deeply about your own role as a citizen and your shared vision for a better world. And if you're following along on your own, we're grateful that you've joined in, too. We believe you'll find that this process gives you an encouraging sense of connection to the many online reflection-action circles, both face-to-face and virtual, that we are creating together.

You are part of community being created all across America and around the world. Neighbors, congregants, colleagues, and students are gathering all over the country to explore the habits of the heart that Parker Palmer describes in his recently released book, *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit*. We've collaborated with author and activist Courtney E. Martin to create this guide and she'll be providing support online throughout the experience. It's going to take all of us—minds bright and hearts broken open—to restore this country back to its potential, and we think these circles can be a wonderful contribution to this effort.

Parker Palmer's work has long been an inspiration for us at the Center for Courage & Renewal, an organization that he founded. We aim to nurture personal and professional integrity and the courage to act on it through a variety of experiences and efforts—of which this Action Circle effort is the latest.



We encourage you to use this guide in whatever ways fits your particular community and context, but here's the basic set-up that we envisioned for you to play off:

- Meet six times over six months, a couple of hours each time, in a place where people are comfortable and can hear one another easily and speak freely. If possible, have a computer handy from which you can play online videos, as we include many of them in this guide as inspiration.
- In each meeting you will do two things: 1) discuss your experiences reflecting on and experimenting with the habit of the heart that was introduced in the previous meeting, and 2) discuss a new habit of the heart to focus on for the month ahead. Note that we call the activities associated with each habit “adventures.” This is not to make light of the complex and often difficult experiences so many of us have within our fractured democracy, but rather to infuse it with a renewed sense of wonder and possibility.
- In between meetings, tune into all of the inspiration that we're sending out:
  - Twitter (@couragerenewal)
  - Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Center-for-Courage-Renewal/47893474972>)
  - Our blog at the Center for Courage & Renewal (<http://www.couragerenewal.org/blog>) on the monthly theme.
- Feed your thoughts, feelings, and experiences back to us in whatever form works for you. We'd love to publish videos, poems, photographs, stories, and whatever else emerges from your individual and collective journeys.

We'd like to invite you to see your Healing Democracy Action Circle as “a space apart” from the kinds of group dynamics you are exposed to on a regular basis at work, in school, or in other institutional settings. In other spaces, you are probably expected to sound smart, to represent others, to establish your own expertise, to be efficient, to problem solve. In this space, we invite you to be open and humble, to respect the power of silence, to speak only for yourself and your own experiences, to hold tension, to be vulnerable, to have fun.

We're thrilled that you're taking on this challenge and opportunity and can't wait to learn from you along the way. Please be in touch with questions, observations, and inspiration. As Parker Palmer wrote, “The heart's dynamics and the ways in which they are shaped lack the drama and the ‘visuals’ to make the evening news...now is the time for the restoration to begin.”<sup>i</sup>



# SESSION I

## Go over group agreements.

In your first meeting together, we encourage you to take a little bit of time to get to know one another and then agree on some shared expectations for how your group will operate. This may feel a bit formal, but it's well worth it in our experience—particularly as we are all aiming to create groups that avoid the ruts of regular conversation and argument, instead striving for an interaction that is truly distinct and different.

Please see the Resource Guide for *Touchstones* that we've developed over the many years we've done our own Circle of Trust® work. Read them aloud, discuss any questions or concerns, and feel free to add some of your own. (And by all means, please let us know what you add; we're curious to learn from you.)

## Reflect on and practice listening.

One of the most endangered arts in our society is listening. Do a simple and fun exercise with your group to help set the tone of the high level listening that you'll expect from and offer to one another.



**THE EXERCISE:** split into pairs. Identify person A and person B. Person A will speak for 3 minutes about this question—*where, when, and from whom did you first learn about being a citizen?*—while Person B practices doing nothing but listening attentively. Switch. Discuss your experiences/observations as a group. Questions you might explore with the group: *Why is it so rare to be listened to in this way in our current society? How can we create more opportunities to this kind of listening in our lives? Who are our personal models of great listening?*



## Reflect on and practice asking honest, open questions.

Please read aloud our *Guidelines for Asking Honest, Open Questions* in the Resource Guide. Discuss them as a group. We then recommend repeating the exercise on citizenship above but this time explore asking each other honest, open questions.



**THE EXERCISE:** Return to your original pairs and repeat the prior exercise but this time the listener can ask honest, open questions in the spirit of the guidelines just discussed. Switch. Again, discuss your experiences of both being listened to and questioned in this manner. Questions you might explore with the group: *How was your understanding as speaker and listener enriched or deepened through this process of asking and responding to honest, open questions? How come we rarely hear these types of questions in our day-to-day lives? What can we do to create more opportunities to inquire and listen to the other in this way?*

## Reframe the word *heart*.

As your group explores the habits of the heart in these next six months, it's important that you share a foundational idea about what Parker Palmer means by heart in the first place. Please read this passage from *Healing the Heart of Democracy* aloud:

“In this book, the word *heart* reclaims its original meaning. ‘Heart’ comes from the Latin *cor* and points not merely to our emotions but to the core of the self, that center place where all of our ways of knowing converge—intellectual, emotional, sensory, intuitive, imaginative, experiential, relational, and bodily, among others. The heart is where we integrate what we know in our minds with what we know in our bones, the place where our knowledge can become more fully human. *Cor* is also the Latin root from which we get the word *courage*. When all that we understand of self and world comes together in the center place called the heart, we are more likely to find the courage to act humanely on what we know.”<sup>ii</sup>



**THE EXERCISE:** Encourage each person in your group to draw a heart—anatomical or symbolic—on a piece of paper and spend the next few minutes in silence, filling their heart with a few of the “knowings” that they’ve been realizing or wrestling with lately. Share your reflections briefly. Keep your drawings. We’ll come back to them in a later meeting.

## Introduce the five habits.

Read them aloud.

1. An understanding that we are all in this together.
2. An appreciation of the value of "otherness."
3. An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways.
4. A sense of personal voice and agency.
5. A capacity to create community.

Make clear that these are not intended to be rules; instead they are invitations. As Parker Palmer writes, "At the deepest levels of human life, we do not need techniques. We need insights into ourselves and our world that can help us understand how to learn and grow from our experiences of diversity, tension, and conflict."<sup>iii</sup>

Rather than seeing these as techniques that you are practicing over the course of these next six months together, we encourage you to see them as invitations for reflection inward and experiment outward, opportunities to grow and stretch amid the undeniable cacophony of our modern times. This should be messy and it should be fun.

## Explore the first habit.

Without further ado, get down to exploring your first habit. First, watch this short video about the habit, created by a team at the Center for Courage & Renewal, and discuss it: <http://bit.ly/zrBk1M>

Now, read Parker Palmer's description of this first habit aloud:

"An understanding that we are all in this together: Ecologists, economists, ethicists, philosophers of science and religious and secular leaders have all given voice to this theme: despite our illusions of individualism and national superiority, human beings are a profoundly interconnected species, with each other and with all forms of life, as the global economic and ecological crises reveal in vivid and frightening detail. We must understand the simple fact that we are dependent upon and accountable to one another—including the stranger, the 'alien other.' At the same time, we need to save this notion from the idealistic excesses that make it an impossible dream. Exhorting people to hold a moment-by-moment awareness of their global or even national interconnectedness is a counsel of perfection that can lead only to self-delusion or discouragement and defeat."



**DISCUSS.** Possible questions to get the conversation going: *When do you feel most aware of your interconnection to and interdependence on other people? When do you feel most disconnected? How has technology changed the nature of our interconnection in the last few years?*

Choose from some of these **interesting prompts** to discuss further:  
Author Steven Johnson discusses *Where Good Ideas Come From* come from:  
<http://bit.ly/wYfffs> (4:07)

“Wandering Around the Albuquerque Airport” by Naomi Shihab Nye:  
<http://bit.ly/xjrk6q>

Social Entrepreneur Jacqueline Novogratz talks about the central story in her book, *The Blue Sweater: Bridging the Gap between Rich and Poor in an Interconnected World*:  
<http://bit.ly/xTC9nE> (2:45)

## Send each other off with an adventure!

For the first habit, “An understanding that we are all in this together,” we invite you to do the following between now and your next meeting:

**THE ADVENTURE:** Think of someone in your life that you come into contact with on a regular basis, but know nothing about. It might be a parent in your child’s school, a maintenance worker in your office building, or the person who buys your produce at the local farmer’s market. Take some time to ask them their name and a little bit about themselves. Try to learn about one thing that is really important to them in their lives. If it feels comfortable, take a picture or video of them and write about the experience.

Don’t forget to check-in on our regular infusions of inspiration by following us on Twitter (@couragerenewal), and checking in at our Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Center-for-Courage-Renewal/47893474972>) and blog (<http://www.couragerenewal.org/blog>). And please send us your insights along the way.

*Good luck!*

# SESSION II

## Welcome each other back.

As it's been a whole month since you last gathered, you might want to do a quick go around letting everybody re-introduce themselves. Reread the *Touchstones* that you discussed last session to keep them fresh and present. Ask your group: *which, if any, touchstone stuck with you between meetings?*

## Reflect on and practice asking honest, open questions.

Please read aloud our *Guidelines for Asking Honest, Open Questions* in the Resource Guide. Discuss them as a group. Build on the exercise you did last session around listening, but this time, add in the art of questioning.



**THE EXERCISE:** split into pairs. Identify person A and person B. Person A will speak for 3 minutes about this question—*When was there a time in your life when you've felt most involved in a community?*—while Person B practices asking honest, open questions in the spirit of the guidelines just discussed. Switch. Again, discuss your experiences of both being listened to and questioned, and listening to and questioning your partner. Questions you might explore with the group: *Was it difficult for you to ask honest, open questions? Why or why not? What was it like to be asked honest, open questions? Who is your role model of great honest, open questions?*



## Show & Tell.

Now's the time for folks to report back about their adventures with the first habit:  
“An understanding that we are all in this together.”

Here are some questions that might inspire conversation: *What was most surprising about the person you spoke with? What prevents you from having these kinds of conversations on a more regular basis? How has this exchange changed your daily interactions with this person?*

With gratitude for your courage and your learnings, close this habit out with this quotation from Parker Palmer: “In the company of strangers, we can learn that we are all in this together despite our many differences; that some of our differences are enriching and those that are vexing are negotiable; that it is possible to do business amicably with one another even in the face of conflicting interests.”<sup>iv</sup>

## Explore the second habit.

Without further ado, get down to exploring your second habit. First, watch this short video about a book called *The Other Wes Moore*: <http://bit.ly/wFxZfN>.



**DISCUSS:** *what themes of “otherness” do you see in these twin stories? Wes Moore says, “The tragedy isn’t just that my story could have been his, but that his could have been mine.” Whose story could have been yours? Whose story could yours have been?*

Now, read Parker Palmer’s description of this habit aloud:

“An appreciation of the value of ‘otherness.’: Despite the fact that we are all in this together, we spend most of our lives in ‘tribes’ or lifestyle enclaves. Thinking of the world in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is one of the many limitations of the human mind that can be overcome only by continual discipline and practice. The good news is that ‘us and them’ does not need to mean ‘us versus them.’ Instead, it can take us back to the ancient tradition of hospitality to the stranger, translating it into meanings that apply to our twenty-first century lives. This is a tradition that does not blink at the fact that many people will always be strangers to us, or that we will always be the stranger to many others. But the tradition of hospitality affirms the many ways we can receive and learn from the stranger, allowing ‘otherness’ to enlarge and revitalize our lives—including the kind of otherness that seems alien and even threatening. This kind of hospitality is impossible if we are unable to see the creative possibilities inherent in diversity.”



**DISCUSS:** possible questions to get the conversation going: *Reflect back on one of your first experiences when you realized that someone considered you to be “the other.” What was that like? Has this been a common experience for you? When was a moment when you encountered someone that you had previously considered an “other”?*

Choose from some of these **interesting prompts** to discuss further:  
Spike Jonze, a filmmaker, Presents: Lil Buck, a b-boy, and Yo-Yo Ma, a classical musician:

<http://bit.ly/y6aoVo> (3:46)

Unlikely friends in an elephant sanctuary:

<http://bit.ly/xdWvqp> (2:44)

Phyllis Rodriguez and Aicha el-Wafi forged a friendship despite unthinkable loss. Rodriguez's son was killed in the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001; el-Wafi's son Zacarias Moussaoui was convicted of a role in those attacks and is serving a life sentence:

<http://http://bit.ly/zFJGVI> (9:54)

## Send each other off with an adventure!

For the second habit, “An appreciation of the value of ‘otherness,’” we invite you to do the following between now and your next meeting:

**THE ADVENTURE:** Reflect on who an “other”—whether because of religion, politics, profession, economic class etc.—might be in your life these days. Make a point of seeking out one person from that demographic group over the course of the next month and having a conversation with them. You need not talk directly about the issue that divides you, unless you’d like to. Just make a point to get to know them a little bit, to understand who they are and what they care about.

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*Good luck!*

# SESSION III

## Welcome each other back.

Go over the *Touchstones* briefly, just to refresh everyone's memories. Ask everybody to name one that they will specifically focus on during this time together.

## Show & Tell.

Now's the time for folks to report back about their adventures with the second habit: "An appreciation of the value of 'otherness.'"

Here are some questions that might inspire conversation: *What was the most surprising thing you discovered about the person you spoke with? Where did your stories converge and intersect? How has this conversation changed the way you see this person or even the ideologies you associate with them?*

With gratitude for your courage and your learnings, close this habit out with this quotation attributed to Benedictine nun Mary Lou Kownacki: "Engrave this upon your heart: there isn't anyone you couldn't love once you heard their story."





## Explore the third habit.

Now it's time for the third habit. First, listen to this segment from a This American Life episode on fatherhood called "Bring Your Child to Work Detail" relating to the habit:

<http://bit.ly/wP6ksO>



**DISCUSS:** *what kinds of tensions do you hear coming up in this story for the people described? What tensions came up for you while listening to it?*

Now, read Parker Palmer's description of this habit aloud:

"An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways: Our inner and outer lives are filled with contradictions—from the gap between our own behavior and our aspirations to the information and ideas we cannot abide because they run counter to our convictions. If we fail to hold them creatively, the non-stop contradictions of our lives will frighten and paralyze us and take us out of the action. But when we learn to hold them in a heart-opening way, they may open us to new ways of understanding ourselves and the world, enhancing our lives and allowing us to enhance the lives of others. We are imperfect and broken beings who live out our lives in an imperfect and broken world. The genius of the human heart lies in its capacity to hold tension in ways that energize and draw us forward instead of tearing us apart."



**DISCUSS:** possible questions to get the conversation going: *What is a challenge that you see your community facing that seems to bring up a lot of tension for people? What are the most successful ways you've seen people deal with that tension? Describe a moment recently when you felt like giving up on something or someone because the tension-holding was just too overwhelming. What did you do? What could you have done?*

Choose from some of these **interesting prompts** to deepen the discussion further: Suheir Hammad's poem and video, "On Egypt:"

<http://bit.ly/AuffZb> (3:00)

"Impermanence: Embracing Change," is a video installation that explores the temporal nature of life. Developed for "The Missing Peace: Artists

Consider the Dalai Lama":

<http://bit.ly/AsvdeD> (2:41)

Janice Wilberg's essay "Fury Cannot Touch Me":

<http://nyti.ms/wokio2>

## Send each other off with an adventure!

For the third habit, “An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways,” we invite you to do the following between now and your next meeting:

**THE ADVENTURE:** Reflect on a tension that you are currently holding in your life. It could be, for example, that you are struggling to think about your responsibility to respond to the violence in your community, or you are trying to find a balance between being supportive and/or invasive when it comes to your adult children’s lives. Now go to three people whom you believe to be truly wise—be sure to include someone very young and someone very old—and ask them for their wisdom on this issue. If you feel comfortable videotape their answers so you can share them.

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*Good luck!*

# SESSION IV

## Welcome each other back.

Go over the *Touchstones* briefly, just to refresh everyone's memories. Chat briefly about which one feels most challenging for folks in the group and why.

## Show & Tell.

Now's the time for folks to report back about their adventures with the third habit: "An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways":

Here are some questions that might inspire conversation: *What was the most surprising answer you heard from your three "wisdom figures"? What was the hardest to hear and why? How did these answers shift the tension you were feeling?*

With gratitude for your courage and your learnings, close this habit out with this quotation from Rainer Maria Rilke: "Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer."<sup>v</sup>



## Explore the fourth habit.

Without further ado, get down to exploring your fourth habit. First, watch this music video that Sarah McLachlan made for her song, World on Fire: <http://bit.ly/A86V0B>



**DISCUSS:** *in what ways is McLachlan using this opportunity, not just to use her voice, but her agency and ingenuity to speak out? Do you think it is effective? Why or why not?*

Now, read Parker Palmer’s description of this habit aloud:

“A sense of personal voice and agency: If we are to take advantage of these energizing potentials, we need to speak and act—not only to express our truth but to allow others to check and correct it as they speak and act in response. But many Americans have little confidence in their own voices or in their power to make a difference. For many reasons—including the fact that educational and religious institutions tend to teach us how to be an audience to a performance rather than participants in a drama—we are a surprisingly passive people. But there are ways to find one’s voice and learn how to speak it—and to know how it feels to make a difference when one does. We must offer such opportunities to more and more people if we want them to be agents of democracy’s renewal.”



**DISCUSS:** possible questions to get the conversation going: *When was a time in your own life when you spoke out—either in speech, writing, or action—and saw the power of your own agency? When was a time you thought about speaking out and didn’t? When and where do you feel most “voiceless” in your day-to-day life?*

Choose from some of these **interesting prompts** to deepen the discussion further:

Morley singing “Women of Hope”:

<http://bit.ly/yl3c2F> (4:24)

Improv Everywhere’s “Say Something Nice” project in action:

<http://bit.ly/wGHYFe> (3:07)

A trailer for a documentary called, “A Small Act,” which depicts the reverberations that one small woman’s gift has had:

<http://vimeo.com/10188872> (3:51)

## Send each other off with an adventure!

For the fourth habit, “A sense of personal voice and agency,” we invite you to do the following between now and your next meeting:

**THE ADVENTURE:** For the next month, keep an “agency log” of your daily life. Notice moments when something occurs or is said that makes you want to speak out. Experiment with when you decide to say what’s on your mind and when you decide to keep your thoughts to yourself. If you’re someone who tends to let it fly, try taking a deep breath and watching instead of reacting. If you’re someone who tends to keep your opinions inside, give yourself a little nudge to say it out loud and see what happens.

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*Good luck!*

# SESSION V

## Welcome each other back.

Go over the *Touchstones* briefly, just to refresh everyone's memories. Discuss: if you could magically incorporate one of the touchstones into every encounter of your day tomorrow, which would you choose and why?

## Show & Tell.

Now's the time for folks to report back about their adventures with the fourth habit: "A sense of personal voice and agency."

Here are some questions that might inspire conversation: *When did you speak out and when did you choose, instead, to keep your feelings or thoughts to yourself? How did you make these decisions? When you spoke up, did it feel worthwhile? Why or why not? When you stayed quiet, what was the value of your silence?*

With gratitude for your courage and your learnings, close this habit out with this quotation from Audre Lorde: "I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood."<sup>vi</sup>



## Explore the fifth and last habit.

It's finally time to explore your fifth habit. First, read Marge Piercy's poem "The Seven of Pentacles" aloud: <http://bit.ly/yTzY7U>



**DISCUSS:** *for you, what is this poem about? What kinds of community connections have you been tending, as Piercy describes, for awhile? How do you continue to be patient as you wait for "the harvest?"*

Now, read Parker Palmer's description of this habit aloud:

"A capacity to create community: Learning to speak and act as an individual does not contradict community but requires it: you can't have one without the other. History consistently teaches that voice and agency are nearly impossible to achieve—let alone to exercise—when there is little or no community in our lives: it takes the support and encouragement of a village to raise up a Rosa Parks. In a mass society like ours, fewer and fewer opportunities for community are ready-made in our lives. But there are many ways to plant and cultivate the seeds of community, small and large, in the places where we live and work: the companionship of two or three people can sometimes make a great difference. We must help each other become gardeners of community if we want democracy to flourish."



**DISCUSS:** possible questions to get the conversation going: *What communities do you see yourself as a part of in everyday life? Did you have to seek out those communities or did they organically evolve in your life? What are the gifts and challenges of being in community for you?*

Choose from some of these **interesting prompts** to deepen the discussion further:  
Read about "The People's Professor," Utne Reader:

<http://bit.ly/xbu4FC>

"The Conversation Exchange," a project of the Secret Society for Creative Philanthropy:

<http://bit.ly/yduRmk> (6:24)

Check out the Mapping Main Street Project, a collaborative documentary:

<http://bit.ly/wNiOXA> (1:45)

## Send each other off with an adventure!

For the fifth habit, “A capacity to create community,” we invite you to do the following between now and your next meeting:

**THE ADVENTURE:** If new people move into your neighborhood, knock on their door and introduce yourself. Tell them that you live nearby and want your neighborhood to be a place where people watch out for each other. Give them a card with your name and phone number, and tell them to give you a call if there is something you might be able help with, like keeping an eye on their house while they are gone. If no one new moves in during this month, try doing this with a long-time neighbor whom you’ve never met. As Parker Palmer writes, “A caring neighborhood is next-door democracy.”

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*Good luck!*



# SESSION VI

## Welcome each other back.

Go over the *Touchstones* briefly, just to refresh everyone's memories.

## Show & Tell.

Now's the time for folks to report back about their adventures with the fifth habit: "A capacity to create community."

Here are some questions that might inspire conversation: *What was it like to greet your neighbor and let them know that you were willing to help? If you greeted a long time neighbor, why do you guess it took you so long to introduce yourself? In what situations have you been the "new kid on the block" and what kind of welcome, or lack thereof, did you get?*

With gratitude for your courage and your learnings, close this habit out with this quotation from Parker Palmer about the potential for community in public space: "In...everyday venues, we settle into the fact that we are part of a large, diverse, and sometimes problematic but often fascinating motley crew. If we use our opportunities in these settings wisely and well, we develop habits of the heart that not only make us better citizens but help us feel more at home on the face of the earth."<sup>vii</sup>

## Consider the future.

Your group may feel that your collective work together is just getting started. If so, here are some next steps you might consider:

- Some of you might want to continue to meet for further conversations about the habits of the heart you've been exploring or tap into other resources that the Center for Courage & Renewal offers. In the latter case, please go to our website and be in touch about how we can be of service as your group continues to evolve.
- One or two of you might like to lead a new group encountering this Action Circle series for the first time. We encourage you to utilize this curriculum again and thereby help "multiply the conversations" that can help heal our democracy.

## Reflect and celebrate your time together.

Though we whole-heartedly encourage you to continue meeting, this may be your last session with one another. It's a critical time to reflect back on what you've learned through this process together and affirm one another for making the commitment for this communal adventure.

First, spend a few minutes reflecting on the quality of interaction that you've experienced over the course of these six months: *How did our agreements change the conversation we had? How might you use that experience in the future? What other areas of your life can you imagine bringing these same "touchstones" into?*

Now spend a few more minutes writing or reflecting in silence: *Which habit of the heart did I find most organic and which did I find most foreign? What were my biggest surprises from being in this group? My biggest learnings? What are three pieces of insight or wisdom that I gleaned from being here, with these people, that I really want to hold on to in the coming months?*

Now return to the heart you drew in the very first meeting.



**DISCUSS:** *in what ways have some of the "knowings" that were in your heart at that time changed, morphed, and/or evolved? What "knowings" were deepened or stayed the same?*

Finally, spend a few moments looking back through your own notes or reflecting back on your time together. Pick out one insight or story that someone else in the group said and go around the circle to express your gratitude for that gift and explain how it has affected the way you see the world or yourself.

Close out your time together by reading this quotation by Parker Palmer and taking time to let it soak in:

"We must judge ourselves by a higher standard than effectiveness, the standard called faithfulness. Are we faithful to the community on which we depend, to doing what we can in response to its pressing needs? Are we faithful to the better angels of our nature and to what they call forth from us? Are we faithful to the eternal conversation of the human race, to speaking and listening in a way that takes us closer to the truth? Are we faithful to the call of courage that summons us to witness to the common good, even against great odds? When faithfulness is our standard, we are more likely to sustain our engagement with tasks that will never end: doing justice, loving mercy, and calling the beloved community into being."<sup>viii</sup>



# RESOURCE GUIDE

## Circle of Trust Touchstones

1. Be present as fully as possible. Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.
2. Choose for yourself when and how to participate. There is always an invitation, never an invasion; always opportunity, never demand.
3. Speak for yourself, of your own truth, with respect for how that might differ from others' truths. Use "I" statements.
4. No fixing, advising, "saving," or correcting one another. Instead, learn to respond to others with honest, open questions. With such questions, we help "hear each other into deeper speech."
5. When the going gets rough, turn to wonder and curiosity. If you feel judgmental, or defensive, ask yourself, "I wonder what brought her to this belief?" "I wonder what he's feeling right now?" "I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?" Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.
6. Trust and learn from the silence. Silence is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the group. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.
7. Observe confidentiality.

# A Primer on Honest, Open Questions

Learning to ask honest, open questions is challenging. We may slip occasionally into old “fixing” habits and need forgiveness, from others and from ourselves. As the old saw goes, “Forgive and remember!” and try not to make that particular mistake again. It helps to continually remind ourselves that our purpose in this exercise is not to show what good problem-solvers we are, but simply to support another person in listening to his or her own wisdom.

- The best single mark of an honest, open question is that the questioner could not possibly anticipate the answer to it.
- The best questions are often simple questions. Ask questions that are brief and to the point rather than larding them with rationales and background materials that allow you to insert your own opinions or advice. Avoid storytelling, or behaviors that call attention to yourself.
- Ask questions aimed at helping the person explore his or her concern rather than satisfying your own curiosity.
- Try not to get ahead of the person you are listening to. “What did you mean when you said you felt sad?” is an honest, open question. “Didn’t you also feel angry?” is not.
- Allow questions to “bubble up” or emerge, rather than force them. If you aren’t sure about a particular question, sit with it for a while and wait for clarity.
- If you have an intuition that a certain question might be useful, even if it seems a bit “off the wall,” trust it—once you are reasonably certain that it is an honest, open question. E.g., “What color is this issue for you, and why?”
- Sometimes questions that invite images or metaphors can open things up in ways that more direction questions don’t.

Here are a couple of examples of a listener shifting from leading, loaded questions to honest, open questions:

Do you think your neighbor was really telling you the truth? → What did your gut tell you about what your neighbor shared?

I've totally had that experience. It was so infuriating. What did you do? → How did you feel about what you chose to do?

Sounds like this was a really defining moment for you. Is that how you think of it? → If you had to put that conversation to music, what kind of music would it be?

# References

<sup>i</sup>Palmer, Parker. *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit*. Jossey-Bass, 2011. 10.

<sup>ii</sup>Palmer. 6

<sup>iii</sup>Palmer. 15

<sup>iv</sup>Palmer. 99

<sup>v</sup>Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*. W.W. Norton & Company, 1934

<sup>vi</sup>Lorde, Audre. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," in *Sister Outsider*. Crossing Press, 1984

<sup>vii</sup>Palmer. 101.

<sup>viii</sup>Palmer, 293.

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## Links for Discussion

Here is a list of the links to video and audio clips and texts suggested as discussion starters in the Center for Courage and Renewal's *Healing Democracy Action Circles Guide*.

Before deciding which of the video or audio clips to use during your sessions, think about whether you will have the equipment needed in the location where you will be meeting (high-speed wireless connection, projector and screen or a display or television screen that is large enough for comfortable viewing by all participants, etc.).

Videos that can be downloaded onto a computer and played offline are noted below, but otherwise be sure that your connection speed is fast enough for smooth viewing.

Instead of using the video or audio during the session, you could have participants view or listen to the clips on their own beforehand. (They can type the URL into their browser, click on the links in the electronic version of the Action Circles Guide, or click on the links on this page – refer them to <https://www.wichurches.org/links-for-discussion/>.)

### Session 1

p. 6

Short video about the first habit: <http://bit.ly/zrBk1M>

p. 7:

Author Steven Johnson discusses *Where Good Ideas Come From*: <http://bit.ly/wYfffs> (4:07)

“Wandering Around the Albuquerque Airport” by Naomi Shihab Nye:

<http://bit.ly/xjrk6q>

Social Entrepreneur Jacqueline Novogratz talks about the central story in her book, *The Blue Sweater: Bridging the Gap between Rich and Poor in an Interconnected World*: <http://bit.ly/xTC9nE> (2:45)

### Session 2

p. 9:

Short video about a book called *The Other Wes Moore*: <http://bit.ly/wFxZfN>

p. 10

Spike Jonze, a filmmaker, Presents: Lil Buck, a b-boy, and Yo-Yo Ma, a classical musician <http://bit.ly/y6aoVo> (3:46)

Unlikely friends in an elephant sanctuary: <http://bit.ly/xdWvqp> (2:44)

Phyllis Rodriguez and Aicha el-Wafi forged a friendship despite unthinkable loss: <http://bit.ly/zFJGVI> (9:54)

**[Downloadable]**

### Session 3

p. 12

This American Life episode on fatherhood called “Bring Your Child to Work Detail”: <http://bit.ly/wP6ksO>

Suheir Hammad’s poem and video, “On Egypt.” <http://bit.ly/AuffZb> (3:00)

“Impermanence: Embracing Change,” a video installation that explores the temporal nature of life: <http://bit.ly/AsvdeD> (2:41)

Janice Wilberg’s essay “Fury Cannot Touch Me”: <http://nyti.ms/wokio2>

#### Session 4

p. 15

Music video by Sarah McLachlan for her song, World on Fire: <http://bit.ly/A86V0B>

Morley singing “Women of Hope”: <http://bit.ly/yl3c2F> (4:24)

Improv Everywhere’s “Say Something Nice” project in action: <http://bit.ly/wGHYFe> (3:07)

A trailer for a documentary called, “A Small Act”: <http://vimeo.com/10188872> (3:51) [Downloadable]

#### Session 5

p. 18

Marge Piercy’s poem “The Seven of Pentacles”: [http://www.best-poems.net/marge\\_piercy/the\\_seven\\_of\\_pentacles.html](http://www.best-poems.net/marge_piercy/the_seven_of_pentacles.html)

“The People’s Professor,” Utne Reader: <http://bit.ly/xbu4FC>

“The Conversation Exchange,” a project of the Secret Society for Creative Philanthropy: <http://bit.ly/yduRmk> (6:24)

Mapping Main Street Project, a collaborative documentary: <http://bit.ly/wNiOXA> (1:45)



# Baha'i Perspectives on Parker Palmer's Five Habits of the Heart

Habit 1: An understanding that we are all in this together

**O CHILDREN OF MEN!**

**Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory.**

(Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words)

*Discussion: Why are we all created from dust, not gold or jewels? Is it easier to be united if we are all from the same dust? Is it easier to be detached?*

Habit 2: An appreciation of the value of “otherness”

**O ye lovers of this wronged one! Cleanse ye your eyes, so that ye behold no man as different from yourselves. See ye no strangers; rather see all men as friends, for love and unity come hard when ye fix your gaze on otherness. And in this new and wondrous age, the Holy Writings say that we must be at one with every people; that we must see neither harshness nor injustice, neither malevolence, nor hostility, nor hate, but rather turn our eyes toward the heaven of ancient glory. For each of the creatures is a sign of God, and it was by the grace of the Lord and His power that each did step into the world; therefore they are not strangers, but in the family; not aliens, but friends, and to be treated as such.**

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Baha)

*Discussion: How do we speak to people so that they will feel as family and friends? How should we interact with them on virtual spaces such as email and Facebook? What if they seem to show malevolence, hostility or hatred toward us?*

Habit 3: An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways

**A critic may object, saying that peoples, races, tribes and communities of the world are of different and varied customs, habits, tastes, character, inclinations and ideas, that opinions and thoughts are contrary to one another, and how, therefore, is it possible for real unity to be revealed and perfect accord among human souls to exist?**



**In answer we say that differences are of two kinds. One is the cause of annihilation and is like the antipathy existing among warring nations and conflicting tribes who seek each other's destruction, uprooting one another's families, depriving one another of rest and comfort and unleashing carnage. The other kind which is a token of diversity is the essence of perfection and the cause of the appearance of the bestowals of the Most Glorious Lord.**

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Baha)

*Discussion: How must we understand and embrace differences among people for these differences to be “tokens of diversity” and “the essence of perfection” and “the cause of appearance of the bestowals of the Lord”?*

#### Habit 4: A sense of personal voice and agency

**God has not intended man to blindly imitate his fathers and ancestors. He has endowed him with mind or the faculty of reasoning by the exercise of which he is to investigate and discover the truth; and that which he finds real and true, he must accept. He must not be an imitator or blind follower of any soul. He must not rely implicitly upon the opinion of any man without investigation; nay, each soul must seek intelligently and independently, arriving at a real conclusion and bound only by that reality. The greatest cause of bereavement and disheartening in the world of humanity is ignorance based upon blind imitation. It is due to this that wars and battles prevail; from this cause hatred and animosity arise continually among mankind.**

(‘Abdu'l-Baha, Foundations of World Unity)

*Discussion: If we all were to follow this guidance, investigating questions for ourselves and reaching our own conclusions, how then are we prepared to join with others in decision-making and community building? How can our independent investigation of truth help to prevent discord, hatred and strife?*

#### Habit 5: A capacity to create community

**All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Say: O friends! Drink your fill from this crystal stream that floweth through the heavenly grace of Him Who is the Lord of Names. Let others partake of its waters in My name, that the leaders of men in every land may fully recognize the purpose for which the Eternal Truth hath been revealed, and the reason for which they themselves have been created.**

(Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah)

*Discussion: Our leaders, whether political, economic or institutional, all have a responsibility to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. But we ordinary people have the same responsibility. If we display the virtues mentioned by Baha'u'llah, how will this civilization be different from the world today? How can we contribute to creating this community right now in our daily lives?*

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Prepared by the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Milwaukee

## **Buddhist Perspectives on Parker Palmer's Five Habits of the Heart:**

### **1) An understanding that we are all in this together**

*There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones notices: When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn't, that isn't. From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.*

**Angutarra Nikaya**

*If I am related to the sun and moon as you are related to the sun and moon, then how is it possible to say that I am here and you are there when we are always related? It's just your mind that says you are here and I am there, that's all. Originally, we are one with everything.*

**--Shunryu Suzuki, Not Always So.**

The Buddhist doctrine of interdependence was expressed beautifully by a certain Christian minister:

*We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will perish together as fools. We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason 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.*

**--Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

#### **Reflection and inquiry:**

How does being woven together with others become apparent in your daily life? How do you express your individuality in light of the fact that you are one with all beings? With this understanding as a foundation for your life, how might you choose to live?

### **2) An appreciation of the value of 'otherness'**

*The offspring of Buddha have thoroughly realized that distinctions are merely mundane conventions.*

**--Avatamsaka Sutra**

*Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state. Let none through anger or ill-will wish harm upon another. Even as a mother protects with her life her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings – radiating kindness over the entire world, spreading upwards to the skies, and downwards to the depths, outwards and unbounded, freed from hatred and ill-will. Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down, one should sustain this recollection. This is said to be the sublime abiding.*

**--Sutta Nipata**

#### **Reflection and inquiry:**

When you encounter another person, imagine that you are in their shoes and try to feel what it would be like to be that person. What leads us to define someone as “not

like me”? What are we missing when we do not see the value in things other than the familiar? How does this type of reflection affect your relations with others?

### 3) An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways

*In each situation that you are faced with, just consider carefully, do anything which will bring even a little benefit to the person who is before you, without concern for what people will think of you.*

--Eihei Dōgen, Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki

*When someone whom I've assisted and in whom I place great hope inflicts upon me extremely bad harm, I shall view them that one as my supreme spiritual friend.*

--Lagri Thag-pa Dorge Senge, Thought Transformation in 8 Stanzas

*What are wholesome intentions? They are the intention of generosity, the intention of loving-kindness, and the intention of compassion. These are called wholesome intentions.*

--Majjhima Nikaya

#### **Reflection and inquiry:**

How do we listen calmly to another's position that we strongly disagree with? How do we respond and state our own position in words that would be helpful in this situation? Can we “agree to disagree” without poisoning the relationship?

### 4) A sense of personal voice and agency

*Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration “The monk is our teacher.” Kalamas, when you yourselves know: ‘These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness’, enter on and abide in them.*

--Anguttara Nikaya

*Meditate on slanderous words and make them into friends*

*That will guide you on the way of the good.*

*If a slander raises hate in you,*

*How can you manifest the wisdom and compassion of the non-born?*

--Yung-chia Hsuan-chueh, The Song of Awakening

*Barefoot and shirtless, enter the market*

*Smiling through all dirt and grime.*

*No immortal powers, no secret spells,*

*Just teach the withered trees to bloom.*

The Ten Oxherding Pictures

#### **Reflection and inquiry:**

What holds us back from offering our opinions in a group? How does speaking in a truthful, beneficial and kind way create a sense of courage and well-being? Can we be self-confident without the need to dominate and to be “right”?

### **5) A capacity to create community**

*“—one may know how admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life. It is in dependence upon the Buddha as an admirable friend that beings subject to birth have gained release from birth, that beings subject to aging have gained release from aging, that being subject to death have gained release from death, that beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair have gained release. It is through this line of reasoning that one may know how admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life.”*

**--Uppaddha Sutta**

*‘Kind speech’ means that when you see sentient beings, you arouse the heart of compassion and offer words of loving care. It is contrary to cruel or violent speech. Know that kind speech arises from the kind heart, and the kind heart from the seed of compassionate heart. Ponder the fact that kind speech is not just praising the merit of others; it has the power to turn the destiny of the nation.*

**--Eihei Dōgen, The Bodhisattva’s Four Methods of Guidance**

### **Reflection and inquiry:**

What do we think of when we say “community,” only people who agree with us, only persons bound together by a common goal? What are my responsibilities toward my community? How do I reflect this in my daily life?

## Supplement to “Healing Democracy Action Circles Guide” for Churches

Wisconsin Council of Churches, June 2012

### **Introduction**

This supplement is designed to be used with the “Healing Democracy Action Circles Guide” from the Center on Courage and Renewal (<http://www.couragerenewal.org/actioncircles>), a six-session discussion guide based on the book *Healing the Heart of Democracy* by Parker Palmer. The Guide explores each of five “habits of the heart” that are essential for sustaining a healthy democracy:

- An understanding that we are all in this together;
- An appreciation of the value of ‘otherness’;
- An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways;
- A sense of personal voice and agency; and
- A capacity to create community.

The Wisconsin Council of Churches has prepared this supplement for using the Guide in church groups. It connects the five habits with biblical passages, drawn mostly from St. Paul’s letters to churches in the First Century. (Supplements are also available for use in other faith communities.)

St. Paul was dealing with conflicts within Christian communities, whereas we are also concerned with polarization over political or social issues in our state or nation as a whole. But the distinction is not clear-cut. In our time, as well as in St. Paul’s, divisions with a congregation arise out of religious disagreements, or reflect divisions in the wider society, or are a combination of both.

### **Setting Goals for these Sessions**

Before you start planning and promoting your sessions, think carefully about the goals for the sessions in light of the interests and attitudes of your congregation’s members, such as:

- Developing skills for having respectful conversations with others, whether family members, coworkers, or strangers;
- Creating a supportive environment for people to share their experiences, hopes, and fears about talking across dividing lines about public issues;
- Bringing together people from different perspectives and walks of life to practice civil dialogue with one another.

How you frame your invitation to participate and the persons you choose to invite personally will depend on your goals for the group. In practice, however, the group and its members may be motivated by more than one purpose to one degree or other, and you may need to be flexible.

### **Using the Study Circles Guide and this Supplement.**

The Guide and Supplement can be used in a variety of formats. For example:

- A series of Sunday morning adult forums;
- A series of evening or weekend discussion groups;
- An ecumenical discussion series with other congregations; or
- A retreat for your church council or social witness committee

There is no set time limit for the Study Circles sessions or their parts. If the timeframe you adopt for your discussions isn't long enough to include all the discussion questions, readings, videos, etc. in a single meeting, you may wish to take two meetings to cover each session, or cut out some parts of the session.

We urge you, however, to be sure to include five or ten minutes in each session for reflection on the Bible passages and questions in this supplement. This will help you to think together about how practicing civil conversation in the church can help to build up "the body of Christ" in today's world. Instructions on where to insert these exercises in the discussion are given with the readings and questions for each session below.

You should be aware that the exercises in the Study Circles guide include watching and discussing several online videos. We encourage you to use these – but be sure that you have the necessary computer and projector available, set up, and tested well before your session.

#### Facilitator Training Sessions

You may wish to take advantage of facilitator training sessions offered by the Wisconsin Council of Churches. Check for information about the "Season of Civility" project on the Council's website, [www.wichurches.org](http://www.wichurches.org)

### **Session 1: An understanding that we are all in this together**

Following “Introduce the five habits” and before “Explore the first habit,” read or ask someone to read aloud **Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16** while the others in the group follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS.** *How do you understand the relationship between the unity and the diversity of Christians, not only around the world but also in your own congregation? Does the image of the “body of Christ” help you to understand this relationship, or is there another image that you find more helpful? What can we do as members to help strengthen or increase the unity of the church?*

Continue the session with “Explore the first habit.”

### **Session 2: An appreciation for the value of “otherness”**

Following “Show & Tell” and before “Explore the second habit,” read or ask someone to read aloud **Luke 24:13-35** while the others in the group follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS.** *Is there a time when you received information or insight from a stranger or some other unexpected source? In what times or places of your daily life are you most likely to hear from someone with a very different perspective on the world? How might we think about such encounters that will make us more open to learning from those who are “other”?*

Continue the session with “Explore the Second Habit.”

### **Session 3: An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways**

Following “Show & Tell” and before “Explore the third habit,” read the following passage from **Parker Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, p. 149.**

In Christian tradition, the broken-open heart is virtually indistinguishable from the image of the cross. It was on the cross that God’s heart was broken for the sake of humankind, broken open into a love that Christ’s followers are called to emulate. Even as a physical form, the cross – with arms that stretch left and right and up and down – symbolizes the tension, the “excruciating” tension, that can open the heart to love.

Then, read or ask someone to read aloud **Romans 8:14-27** while the others in the group follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** *Do you see a connection between your own broken-heartedness and the broken-heartedness of Jesus on the cross, or the brokenness of creation? Why or why not? Are there any spiritual practices – e.g., prayer, meditation, Bible study, worship -- that deepen your awareness of the Spirit’s power for dealing constructively with tensions or brokenness in your life?*



#### **Session 4: A sense of personal voice and agency**

Following "Show & Tell" and before "Explore the fourth habit," read or ask someone to read **Matthew 15:21-28** aloud while the others in the group follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** *How does the Canaanite woman use her personal voice and agency? How do Jesus' responses (note the plural) to her compare to the response she gets from the disciples? What do you learn from this exchange that applies the use of your own voice and agency?*

Continue with "Explore the fourth habit."

#### **Session 5: A capacity to create community**

Following "Show & Tell" and before "Explore the fifth and last habit," read or ask someone to read **Romans 12:9-21** aloud while the others in the group follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** *Think of the community that Paul is urging his readers to become as if it were a garden. How would you describe that garden in a word or a short phrase? What habits or practices are the "seeds" of community to be nurtured in this passage? What are the "weeds" that need to be removed?*

Continue with "Explore the fifth and last habit."

#### **Session 6**

Following "Show & Tell" and before "Consider the Future," read or ask someone to read **1 Corinthians 13:1-13** aloud while the others in the group follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** *How would you apply these "touchstones" of love to our efforts to help heal democracy in our time and place? Can understanding these habits as expressions of Christian love in community deepen your understanding or appreciation of them?*

Continue with "Consider the Future."

**SEASONS OF CIVILITY:**  
**AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON PARKER PALMER'S FIVE HABITS OF THE**  
**HEART**

*[Note: On May 21, 2012, the Islamic Society of Milwaukee and more than thirty other religious organizations signed a statement calling for the citizens of Wisconsin to enter into a "Season of Civility" amidst the current "hostile political rhetoric (that) is overstepping the bounds of civility and even decency in our congregations and the society at large." The Islamic Society of Milwaukee's Religious Director, Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Shah, offers the following passages from the Qur'an and remarks on the Islamic perspective towards Parker Palmer's Five Habits of the Heart and respectful dialogue between all human beings, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. The Five Habits and some Discussion/Reflection Questions are inserted below in italics amongst the remarks.]*

***Habit 1: An understanding that we are all in this together***

We are all human beings. We come from the same Father Adam and Mother Eve and we are instructed by God not to forget this fact. The Qur'an states:

4:1 "O MANKIND! Be conscious of your Lord, who has created you out of one living entity [soul], and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women. And remain conscious of God, in whose name you demand [your rights] from one another, and of these ties of kinship. Verily, God is ever watchful over you!"

Almighty God has honored all humans with a soul, a divine gift. Human dignity is based upon this common denominator and is the source of God-given universal human rights such as life, liberty, freedom of religion and conscience, property ownership, dignified life, family and lawful wealth. No one is allowed to compromise or violate others' God given rights.

*For discussion or reflection: Reflect on the fact that the verse is addressed to all mankind, rather than just to the Muslim believer. What does the fact that all human beings belong to the same family have to say about how we should treat one another and any claim of superiority based upon race, sex or other biological differences? What is the significance of the statement that all human rights flow from God? What is the significance of God asking human beings to be mindful of "these ties of kinship (with the rest of humanity)"?*

***Habit 2: An appreciation of the value of "otherness"***

We are reminded that no person is better than any other person, except the one who is more God-conscious and also better in conduct. The Qur'an states:

49:13 "O MANKIND! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware."

*For discussion or reflection: Reflect on the fact that the verse is addressed to all mankind, rather than just to the Muslim believer. Note the statement, similar to Qur'an 4:1 above, of the common biological and familial origin of all human beings. How should the fact that our differences are stated to be for a positive purpose of coming to know each other - rather than any negative purpose such as to despise, hate or destroy one another – impact my community's and my attitude and behavior towards "otherness"?*

### **Habit 3: An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways**

Human diversity is part of God's divine plan. The Qur'an states:

5:48 "...Unto every (faith community) have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto, you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ.

It is natural to have different feelings and opinions. Our differences should not and must not lead us to treat others ill or go to the extreme of considering others as non-human strangers to be afraid of. We must celebrate human diversity and learn from one another. Our common humanity and respect for human dignity must supersede our political, national and religious differences.

*For discussion or reflection: Reflect on the fact that it was not God's will to create mankind as a single faith community. Reflect on what it means to me that God is going to test my faith community and me by what He has given my community and me. Discuss how God's directive to faith communities to compete (vie) with one another in doing good works can create life-giving benefits to all of humanity and creation.*

### **Habit 4: A sense of personal voice and agency**

Muslims also must exercise respect regarding differences amongst themselves and others. The Qur'an states:

49:10-12 All believers are but brethren. Hence, [whenever they are at odds,] make peace between your two brethren, and remain conscious of God, so that you might be graced with His mercy. O YOU who have attained to faith! No men shall deride [other] men: it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves; and no women [shall deride other] women: it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves. And neither shall you defame one another, nor insult one another by [opprobrious] epithets: evil is all imputation of iniquity after [one has attained to] faith; and they who [become guilty thereof and] do not repent - it is they, they who are evildoers! O you who have attained to faith! Avoid most guesswork [about one another] for, behold, some of [such] guesswork is [in itself] a sin; and do not spy upon one another, and neither allow yourselves to speak ill of one another behind your backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would loathe it! And be conscious of God. Verily, God is an acceptor of repentance, a dispenser of grace!

*For discussion or reflection: Reflect on the fact that the statement that brothers are brethren does not negate the fact that all human beings are “brethren”; see 4:1 and 49:13 above. Reflect on the fact that, although the verse addresses the believers (Muslims), the verse describes standards of a believer’s individual conduct that pertain to his or her conduct towards all men and women – not just believing men and believing women. What is my role as an individual believer to act in a manner that benefits rather than harms others?*

***Habit 5: A capacity to create community***

Disputes are unavoidable due to agendas and interests, which are sometimes open and sometimes hidden. God calls for a group of people in every faith community who will work towards just and amicable solutions. Enjoining good and shunning evil is a human responsibility that should be performed on individual as well as communal levels. The Qur’an states:

3:103-104 And hold fast, all together, unto the bond with God, and do not draw apart from one another. And remember the blessings which God has bestowed upon you: how, when you were enemies, He brought your hearts together, so that through His blessing you became brethren; and [how, when] you were on the brink of a fiery abyss. He saved you from it. In this way God makes clear His messages unto you, so that you might find guidance, and that there may grow out of you a community [of people] who invite unto all that is good, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong: and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state!”

Let us strive to recall our common brotherhood and sisterhood as children of Adam and Eve and try to afford each other the respect and dignity that God requires that we give each other despite our differences.

*For discussion or reflection: The verse is addressed to the believers (Muslims). What does it mean to be a community that “invites” unto all that is good? What does it mean to enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong? How does this relate to 5:48 above, which instructs that God did not will mankind to be one faith community, but instead commanded faith communities to compete in doing good? How does this relate to the other verses quoted earlier acknowledging the dignity of each human being and enjoining good conduct towards all others?*

# Jewish Texts Corresponding to Parker Palmer's Five Habits of the Heart

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## Habit 1: An understanding that we are all in this together.

For this reason a single person was created [Adam was created alone] to teach you that anyone who kills one soul is considered as if he has killed an entire world and anyone who sustains one soul is considered as if he has sustained an entire world. Additionally [Adam is the progenitor of all humanity] for peace among humankind, so that one person won't say to his fellow "My father is greater than your father" ....and to tell the greatness of the Holy One Blessed Be God, that a man mints many coins with one stamp, all of them the same as one another and the Ruler of Rulers, the Holy One Blessed Be God minted every person with the stamp of Adam and not one of them is the same as his fellow.

(Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 37b)

1. *The text presents several reasons for a single source for all humanity. Does one explanation resonate more or less with you?*
2. *Are there times in your life when you have felt interconnected with all humanity? What precipitated these feelings?*
3. *According to the text, can one retain a sense of individuality and still retain a sense of belonging to the whole? Does this match your personal experience?*

## Habit 2: An appreciation for the value of "otherness".

A favorite saying of the Rabbis of Yavneh was: I am God's creature and my fellow is God's creature. My work is in the town and his work is in the country. I rise early for my work and he rises early for his work. Just as he does not presume to do my work, so I do not presume to do his work. Will you say, I do much and he does little? We have learned: One may do much or one may do little; it is all one, provided he directs his heart to heaven.

(Babylonian Talmud. Berakhot 17a)

1. *In what ways have you celebrated your distinctiveness from others?*
2. *In what ways have you celebrated others' distinctiveness from yourself?*
3. *In the text above, what is the common denominator?*

### Habit 3: An ability to hold tension in life giving ways.

*The two texts below focus on the disputations of two contrasting schools of thought in Jewish Law. Though they disagreed, tradition asserted that their debates were of great value and of equal merit. For the most part, Jewish Law followed the conclusions of the School of Hillel due to the positive value they placed on their opponents' perspectives. In fact, the Talmud records instances when the School of Hillel changed their views after studying opposing positions.*

When an argument is for the sake of heaven, the argument will lead to an established result. When an argument is not for the sake of heaven, it will not lead to any established result. What is an argument for the sake of heaven? That of Hillel and Shammai.

(Pirkei Avot 5:17)

For three years there was a dispute between the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel, the former asserting, 'The law is in agreement with our views.' and the latter contending, 'The law is in agreement with our views.' Then a *bat kol* (a voice from heaven) announced, 'these and those are the words of the living God, but the law is in agreement with the rulings of the School of Hillel.' Since, however, 'both are the words of the living God', what was it that entitled the School of Hillel to have the law fixed according to their rulings? Because they were kindly and modest, they studied their own rulings and those of the School of Shammai, and were even so humble as to mention the words of the School of Shammai before their own.

(Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin, 13b)

1. *Is there merit in weighing the perspectives of others?*
2. *Are there times in which there might be equally valid courses of action?*
3. *Should an appreciation for the beliefs of others, play a role in our own deliberations?*
4. *Should the willingness to 'change one's mind' be viewed as a positive or negative attribute?*

## Habit 4: A sense of personal voice and agency.

Justice, Justice shalt thou pursue.

(Deuteronomy 16:20)

Why is the word justice written twice? To teach us that we must practice justice at all times – whether it be for our profit or for our loss, and towards all humanity – towards Jews and non-Jews alike.

(Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 32b)

In a place where there are no [good people]\*, strive to be a [good person]\*.

(Pirkei Avot 2:6)

*In the Jewish tradition there is a belief that no word in the Torah is superfluous. When examining the texts of the Torah the Rabbis found deeper meaning in the repetition of the Hebrew word Tzedek/Justice.*

1. *The above text implores us to be active. In what ways have you been active in making the world a better place for yourself and for others?*
2. *Do you believe you have the responsibility to be a good person even in a place without good people?*
3. *Do you believe it might be more difficult to do what is right in an environment where so many are doing what is wrong?*
4. *Can you think of moments throughout history where good people have found their voice amidst the evil actions of others?*

\*Original Hebrew was men and man but the intent was to mean a person of merit.

## Habit 5: A capacity to create community.

We are created along with one another and directed to a life with one another. Creatures are placed in my way so that I, their fellow creature by means of them and with them find the way to God. A God reached by their exclusion would not be the God of all that lives in whom all is fulfilled.

(Between Man and Man, Martin Buber)

*Martin Buber is one of Judaism's great theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In this excerpt from his work on Christian-Jewish Relations he proposed that we are created together so that we might interact as a fulfillment of all our religious journeys.*

1. *Do you find fulfillment in creating community among people of various beliefs backgrounds and points of view?*
2. *How many communities do you belong to and what role do you play among them? Friends, Family, Faith, Nation?*
3. *What gifts and challenges do these communities provide you?*

Prepared by Rabbi Noah Chertkoff, Congregation Shalom, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

# Healing Democracy Action Circles Unitarian Universalist Supplement

## Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes

Together as Unitarian Universalist Congregations, we affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Unitarian Universalism draws from many sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

### **Parker Palmer's "Habits of the Heart":**

- An understanding that we are all in this together;
- An appreciation of the value of 'otherness';
- An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways;
- A sense of personal voice and agency; and
- A capacity to create community.

Readings and hymns in this study guide are taken from *Singing the Living Tradition*, UUA, 1993.

by Maria Costello O'Connor, MA, MSP  
Director of Religious Education  
Unitarian Universalist Church West  
Brookfield, Wisconsin



## **SESSION 1: An understanding that we are all in this together**

### **Welcome and Chalice Lighting**

*Gather participants in a circle. Light the chalice and share:*

#### **Reading #429**

Come into this place of peace  
and let its silence heal your spirit;  
Come into this place of memory  
and let its history warm your soul;  
Come into this place of prophecy and power  
and let its vision change your heart.

*William F. Schulz*

#### **Hymn #300: With Heart and Mind**

#### **Additional Discussion Questions:**

- Is this Habit of the Heart – we are all in this together – supported in and promoted by Unitarian Universalism?
- What principles or purposes of Unitarian Universalism speak particularly to this habit?
- Are you conscious of being a part of the interdependent web of existence?
- Do you feel more connected with other people or with nature? What does that mean for you?
- How does Unitarian Universalism inform your sense of interdependence? How does Unitarian Universalism assist you with practicing this habit?
- Do you take this habit to heart? How is this habit reflected in your faith and values?
- How do you, as a Unitarian Universalist, live this habit in your daily life?
- Would you like to become more attentive to any aspects of this habit in your life?

#### **Closing Words: Reading #683**

Be ours a religion which,  
like sunshine, goes everywhere;  
its temple, all space;  
its shrine, the good heart;  
its creed, all truth;  
its ritual, works of love;  
its profession of faith, divine living.

*Theodore Parker*

## **SESSION 2: An appreciation of the value of “otherness”**

### **Welcome and Chalice Lighting**

*Gather participants in a circle. Light the chalice and share:*

### **Reading #434**

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations,  
and inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity.  
May we know once again that we are not isolated beings  
but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe,  
to this community, and to each other.

*Anonymous*

### **Hymn #23: Bring Many Names**

#### **Additional Discussion Questions:**

- Is this Habit of the Heart – an appreciation of the value of “otherness” – supported in and promoted by Unitarian Universalism?
- What principles or purposes of Unitarian Universalism speak particularly to this habit?
- Is celebrating diversity an important theme in your Unitarian Universalist faith? In what ways?
- How well do you think our congregation practices radical hospitality and the welcoming of differences? Are there ways we can improve?
- How does Unitarian Universalism inform your sense of appreciation of “otherness”? How does Unitarian Universalism assist you with practicing this habit?
- Do you take this habit to heart? How is this habit reflected in your faith and values?
- How do you, as a Unitarian Universalist, live this habit in your daily life?
- Would you like to become more attentive to any aspects of this habit in your life?

#### **Closing Words: Reading #459**

This is the mission of our faith:  
To teach the fragile art of hospitality;  
To revere both the critical mind and the generous heart;  
To prove that diversity need not mean divisiveness;  
And to witness to all that we must hold the whole world in our hands.

*William F. Schulz*

## **SESSION 3: An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways**

### **Welcome and Chalice Lighting**

*Gather participants in a circle. Light the chalice and share:*

#### **Reading #444: This House**

This house is for the ingathering of nature and human nature.

*It is a house of friendships, a haven in trouble, an open room for the encouragement of our struggle.*

It is a house of freedom, guarding the dignity and worth of every person.

*It offers a platform for the free voice, for declaring, both in times of security and danger, the full and undivided conflict of opinion.*

It is a house of truth-seeking, where scientists can encourage devotion to their quest, where mystics can abide in a community of searchers.

*It is a house of art, adorning its celebrations with melodies and handiworks.*

It is a house of prophecy, outrunning times past and times present in visions of growth and progress.

*This house is a cradle for our dreams, the workshop of our common endeavor.*

*Kenneth L. Patton*

### **Hymn #188: Come, Come, Whoever You Are**

#### **Additional Discussion Questions:**

- Is this Habit of the Heart – an ability to hold tension in life-giving ways – supported in and promoted by Unitarian Universalism?
- What principles or purposes of Unitarian Universalism speak particularly to this habit?
- Do you hold the principle of acceptance of one another and encouragement to growth to be an important theme in your Unitarian Universalist faith? In what ways?
- Does your Unitarian Universalist faith challenge you to open-minded appreciation of differing viewpoints? Or do you find solace and comfort in a community of like-minded individuals?
- How well do you think our congregation practices holding tension creatively? Are there ways we can improve?
- How can we use our faith to help us accept or resolve differences?
- Do you take this habit to heart? How is this habit reflected in your faith and values?
- How do you, as a Unitarian Universalist, live this habit in your daily life?
- Would you like to become more attentive to any aspects of this habit in your life?

#### **Closing Words: Reading #580**

The central task of the religious community is to unveil the bonds that bind each to all. There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others. Once felt, it inspires us to act for justice.

It is the church that assures us that we are not struggling for justice on our own, but as members of a larger community. The religious community is essential, for alone our vision is too narrow to see all that must be seen, and our strength too limited to do all that must be done.

Together, our vision widens and our strength is renewed.

*Mark Morrison-Reed*

## **SESSION 4: A sense of personal voice and agency**

### **Welcome and Chalice Lighting**

*Gather participants in a circle. Light the chalice and share:*

#### **Reading #462:**

I shall take my voice wherever there are those who want to hear the melody of freedom or the words that might inspire hope and courage in the face of despair and fear. My weapons are peaceful, for it is only by peace that peace can be attained. The song of freedom must prevail.

*Paul Robeson*

#### **Hymn #170: We are a Gentle, Angry people**

#### **Additional Discussion Questions:**

- Is this Habit of the Heart – a sense of personal voice and agency – supported in and promoted by Unitarian Universalism?
- What principles or purposes of Unitarian Universalism speak particularly to this habit?
- Is it a matter of faith to you to speak your truth as you know it and to follow your conscience in your daily works? In what ways?
- Does your Unitarian Universalist faith challenge you to become a change agent? A force for good in the world? Do you get help for this from your Unitarian Universalist community?
- How well do you think our congregation encourages personal voice and agency? Are there ways we can improve?
- How do you, as a Unitarian Universalist, live this habit in your daily life?
- Would you like to become more attentive to any aspects of this habit in your life?

#### **Closing Words: Reading #704**

Go out into the highways and by-ways.

Give the people something of your new vision.

You may possess a small light,

but uncover it, let it shine,

use it in order to bring more light and understanding

to the hearts and minds of men and women.

Give them not hell, but hope and courage;

preach the kindness and everlasting love of God.

*John Murray*

## **SESSION 5: A capacity to create community**

### **Welcome and Chalice Lighting**

*Gather participants in a circle. Light the chalice and share:*

#### **Reading #443:**

We arrive out of many singular rooms, walking over the branching streets.

*We come to be assured that brothers and sisters surround us, to restore their images on our eyes.*

We enlarge our voices in common speaking and singing.

*We try again that solitude found in the midst of those who with us seek their hidden reckonings.*

Our eyes reclaim the remembered faces; their voices stir the surrounding air.

*The warmth of their hands assures us, and the gladness of our spoken names,*

This is the reason of cities, of homes, of assemblies in the houses of worship.

*It is good to be with one another.*

*Kenneth L. Patton*

### **Hymn #360: Here We Have Gathered**

#### **Additional Discussion Questions:**

- Is this Habit of the Heart – a capacity to create community – supported in and promoted by Unitarian Universalism?
- What principles or purposes of Unitarian Universalism speak particularly to this habit?
- Do you think that the principle of acceptance of one another and encouragement to growth in our congregations increases the capacity to create community? Or does it inhibit community?
- Does the Unitarian Universalist principle about creating world community help create Beloved Community in our congregation?
- What are some ways our congregation lives into this Habit of the Heart?
- How can we be more attentive to this habit in our community?
- Do you take this habit to heart? How is this habit reflected in your faith and values?

#### **Closing Words: Reading #473**

Love is the spirit of this church,  
and service is its law.

This is our great covenant:

To dwell together in peace,

To seek the truth in love,

And to help one another.

*James Vila Blake*

## **SESSION 6: Consider the future**

### **Welcome and Chalice Lighting**

*Gather participants in a circle. Light the chalice and share:*

### **Reading #578: This Great Lesson**

We can never make the world safe by fighting.

Every nation must learn that the people of all nations are children of God, and must share the wealth of the world.

You may say this is impracticable, far away, can never be accomplished, but it is the work we are appointed to do.

Sometime, somehow, somewhere, we must ever teach this great lesson.

*Olympia Brown*

### **Hymn #169: We Shall Overcome**

### **Additional Discussion Questions:**

- Are there any principles in Unitarian Universalism that urge us to go out as a community into the larger community to make a difference in this world?
- In what ways does your Unitarian Universalist faith inspire you to work for peace or social justice?
- Do you hold the principle of world community as an important theme in your Unitarian Universalist faith? In what ways?
- How well do you think our congregation supports its members in having a positive impact on the world community? Are there ways we can improve?
- Which Habits of the Heart do you think are the most organic in our Unitarian Universalist faith?
- Do you practice any of these Habits of the Heart in your daily life? Are there any you would like to practice more consciously?
- Can you articulate any additional Habits of the Heart that might be practiced in Unitarian Universalism?

### **Closing Hymn #168: One More Step**

### **Closing Words: Reading #561**

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has.

*Margaret Mead*

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## ***Sermons on Civility***

The Wisconsin Council of Churches is inviting pastors throughout the state to send us their sermons which focus on the need for more civil conversation in our polarized political environment. Sermons should be sent in pdf or Word format to Lori Denoyer at [wcoc@wichurches.org](mailto:wcoc@wichurches.org)

### **Downloadable Sermons**

#### **“Civil Intrusions” – Part 1**

John 3:1-17

Rev. Gretchen Lord Anderson

#### **“Be Careful What You Pray For” – Part 2**

1 Samuel 8:4-18

Rev. Gretchen Lord Anderson

#### **“Finding Christ at the Center: Seeing All Sides”**

1:10-13, Matthew 18:18-22, Isaiah 54:9-17

1 Corinthians

Rev. Jim Cotter

#### **“Souls to the Polls”**

John 18: 33-37

Rev. Paul Nulton

#### **“Finding words that give grace”**

Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35, 41-51

Rev. Phil Haslanger

#### **“This is what community looks like”**

Acts 4: 32-35; John 20:19-31

Rev. Phil Haslanger

#### **“Beelzebul and the Blame Game “**

Genesis 3:8-15; Mark 3:20-35, 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Rev. Nick Utphall

#### **The Power of Speech**

James 3:1-10

Rev. Lynne Spencer-Smith

"Civil Intrusions"  
John 3:1-17  
Rev. Gretchen Lord Anderson  
First Presbyterian Church, Lodi, WI  
June 3, 2010

We could be singing "The Eyes of Texas are Upon You," but that wouldn't begin to cover it. The eyes of the entire nation are upon Wisconsin this week as we head to the polls on Tuesday to vote on whether Scott Walker shall continue as governor or if Tom Barrett will replace him. We have come to this point in time through rancor, anger, bitterness and that four-letter-word that leaves a bitter taste in my mouth: hate. People have been physically (and in some cases figuratively) pushed, shoved and spat upon. Children who are too young to make their own decisions have been used by various and sundry proponents of both candidates to carry placards and wear signs defending or promoting this candidate or that platform. Neighbors are finding themselves hardly speaking to one another as they try to one-up each other by placing the larger campaign sign for their candidate or against the neighbor's. Letters to the editor – well, it amazes me about letters to the editor...yes, I read them with some interest after, that is, I look to see if I know the author. And I'm curious about the derisive tone of so many people – I guess I have to give them credit for being willing to sign their names to these pieces, but what surprises me is that they apparently feel that they are such leaders, such examples to the rest of the community that blasting the opponent is something that will make the rest of us get in step with them and follow their logic.

This isn't unique to Wisconsin. It's going on all over the country. And it isn't unique to this election year. We have become increasingly uncivil to one another for many years now, taking only a few days or months out after the attack on the World Trade Center to act as though we are people who care about one another. It's like the formal unveiling this week of former President George W. Bush's portrait in the White House. The way Presidents Obama and Bush exchanged good humor and their wives embraced one another, you'd think they were the best of friends. Same thing happened when the portrait of President Bill Clinton was unveiled. He and Hillary and George and Laura just seemed to have let bygones be bygones and everything was hunky dory.

And that's nice. It's a nice thing to do: put on a display of niceties for a single public occasion. But it doesn't mean anything if it's just for show. If there's any meaning in it at all, it's that the people involved are even more superficial than any of us would like to think.

Now, whether you know it or not, this congregation has, for the past six years, been growing in our understanding of civility. We haven't called it that. We've talked and I've pushed and pushed till you haven't wanted to be pushed anymore about being hospitable to one another, about honoring each others' opinions on issues and on scripture. We have come to an understanding – at least most of the time – that this church needs to be a safe place where we can learn together and from one another and be able to express our opinions, understanding that not everyone else is going to agree with us, and also understanding that none of us has a corner on being right. And we are learning how to disagree while being respectful of one another. In Sunday School classes, in congregational gatherings, in committee meetings, we have laid our cards on the table regarding ordination of gays and lesbians, euthanasia, abortion, and the Constitution. You all have cussed and discussed current and past pastoral leadership. We have wrangled over music in worship, worship times, worship styles, and the color of carpet and roofing tiles. Sometimes we are more successful than other times in terms of how we conduct ourselves with one another in these conversations. Some of that has to do with wanting to get our own way. And I'll talk a little more about that next week, after the election, as we explore what it means to win and to lose (and, for what it's worth, I already have that sermon



in my head so the outcome of the election on Tuesday won't change anything about what I'm going to say unless the behavior of the electorate on election day or the days after demand my attention). And we have adopted a church policy based on scripture, that tells us how we are to address our differences with one another. Quoting the Old Testament Book of Proverbs, we are to go directly to our neighbor to settle our disagreements, not talk about them behind their backs (Proverbs 25:9,10). And quoting The Gospel According to Matthew, we are to try to work out our differences with one another and if that doesn't work, we are to bring in someone else from the church to mediate and if that doesn't work, we need to bring in more witnesses and, if necessary, the entire church (Matthew 18:15-17).

Some of you don't think that policy applies to you. And it doesn't stop us from getting disgusted with each other. And it doesn't make us better human beings to have a policy if we ignore it. But the leaders of the church and you as a congregation approved this policy, therefore acknowledging the need for it.

Now, Nicodemus is a Pharisee. And you and I know that the Pharisees – as we lump them together (as we would lump together and paint with a broad brush Democrats or Republicans or tea partiers or the “occupy Wall Street” folks) – the Pharisees were out to get Jesus. They were trying to trick him into saying anything that would incriminate him from either a religious or a civil standpoint. They didn't care who got rid of him as long as somebody did. So here we have this Pharisee, this leader of the Jews and a pooh-bah at the Temple, who, the scripture says, “came to Jesus by night.” Now, that oughta tell you something. He's alone. He has waited until nightfall when he is least likely to be seen by those with whom he associates (and probably those who call themselves disciples of Jesus as well) and he has come to talk, to ask questions – not in an accusatory fashion, not in a way designed to trick Jesus – but in a way that demonstrates that Nicodemus, while still being a Pharisee wanted to hear without anyone interrupting or accusing or yelling, what Jesus had to say about performing miracles. It doesn't say he was ready to sign up. It just tells us he wanted to hear what Jesus' take was on this. Then, of course, once Jesus starts talking, Nicodemus can't help but ask some follow-up questions – questions about being born again, about the Holy Spirit: stuff that Jesus says, “Nicodemus, you're a student of this stuff. Is it possible that you haven't thought about this particular take on this particular subject?”

There's no acrimony here. Jesus isn't shoving anything down Nicodemus's throat or vice versa. It is a civil conversation between two men schooled in scripture, exchanging thoughts and opinions.

What makes this conversation work is what author Parker Palmer calls “a heart that is broken open.” That is, he says, as opposed to a heart that is “broken apart.”

Now, hear this because it is an important observation on the very basis of civility and how we can reclaim civility in our religious and community conversations.

You and I cannot get through life without heart-breaking circumstances. Life can be hard and we get hurt – deeply hurt – by friends who seem to turn on us, by family who desert us, by bosses and supervisors, by personal loss of those we love. We get hurt in a myriad of ways. Sometimes hurt is deliberately inflicted upon us by others. Other times, it's not intentional, but the hurt, the broken heart is still very real. And which of us could not watch the events of 9-11-2001 without having our hearts break for the loss of human life, for the vulnerability of our country, for the devastation of living and workplaces. We even grieve when our particular candidates or platforms are not accepted by a majority of the voters. We grieve deeply and our hearts are broken.

But what Palmer contends is that it is how we handle our hurt, our broken hearts, that makes all of the difference. If our hearts are broken apart, “the result may be anger, depression, and disengagement.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011, p. 18

It's like those DirecTV ads – you know the ones: where you get frustrated with your cable TV company and that leads you to do something else which leads to something else? “When your cable’s on the fritz, you get frustrated. When you get frustrated, your daughter imitates you. When your daughter imitates you, she gets thrown out of school. When she gets thrown out of school, she meets undesirables. When she meets undesirables, she ties the knot with undesirables. And when she ties the knot with undesirables, you get a grandson with a dog collar. Don’t have a grandson with a dog collar. Get rid of cable and upgrade to DirecTV.”

When our hearts are broken apart, we get a domino effect like that: anger leading to depression, to disengagement or withdrawal from others, and, yes, even to violence, domestically and internationally.

But Parker says if we are deliberate about how we deal with our broken hearts, we can work at seeing that they are not broken apart, but broken open. And when our hearts are broken open, it doesn’t mean we won’t hurt, but rather than having our suffering turn to violence or even incivility, our suffering “can make us more compassionate and receptive, deepening our engagement with others and opening us to new life. The powers of the heart that transform personal anguish can also transform the way we do politics.”<sup>2</sup> Opening us to new life. And what was Nicodemus asking about being born again?

Abraham Lincoln believed that all of us have what he called the “better angels of our nature,”<sup>3</sup> in other words, that all of us have something good inside of us. Theologian C.S. Lewis who became popular during WWII in England with his radio broadcasts designed to help people understand where God might be in the midst of repeated bombings of London and loss of life abroad, also believed that all people are born good, but that life comes to bear on that goodness and it is too often lost. Palmer writes in his book that when our hearts are broken open – rather than apart, “the better angels of our nature” prevail and “the broken-open heart is a source of power as well as compassion – the power to bring down whatever diminishes us and raise up whatever serves us well. We can access and deploy that power by doing what every great social movement has done: *put time, skill, and energy into the education and mobilization of the powers of the heart.* As history consistently demonstrates, heart talk can yield actions just as practical as those driven by conventional forms of power.”<sup>4</sup>

It was *heart talk* that caused Nicodemus to have second thoughts about Jesus and what he was about. The scripture doesn’t tell us that Nicodemus had a sudden transformation, or that he was even converted to Jesus’ way of thinking. My guess is that Nicodemus had to go think about it. Had to go pray about it. And my guess is also that Jesus prayed about Nicodemus too. What we do know is that Nicodemus does speak up on Jesus’ behalf as told in the Gospel of John, and it is Nicodemus who, with Joseph of Arimathea, claims the dead body of Jesus from the cross and takes it to the tomb to be buried.

We do not know if Nicodemus became a Christian. We do know that somehow, through the power of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Nicodemus’ heart was broken open in a way that allowed him to feel and demonstrate compassion and opening him to new life, to being born from above.

Learning to handle heartbreak so that our hearts fall open rather than apart is going to take some effort, a lot of practice. We can start working on that right now because I’ll bet most of us in this room are experiencing some kind of broken-heartedness. And after the election on Tuesday, there will doubtless be more broken-heartedness.

Let us be willing to have the power of the Trinity work through our broken hearts in order to reach our minds that we can be deliberate in our respectful and civil dealings with one another whether we find ourselves in the religious or the political sphere of life. Civility breeds

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<sup>2</sup> Palmer, p. 20

<sup>3</sup> Palmer, p. 20

<sup>4</sup> Palmer, pp. 23-24

understanding. And understanding promotes love, even if we don't like each other very much. We must be born from above so that our hearts are broken open to see Christ in unexpected ways and unexpected people.

For the time being (this discussion will continue next week), Amen.

“Be Careful What You Pray For”  
1 Samuel 8:4-18  
Rev. Gretchen Lord Anderson  
First Presbyterian Church, Lodi, WI  
June 10, 2012

(Second of two sermons on civility; see June 3, 2012 for part 1)

Last week, in advance of our gubernatorial election, we began a discussion about the need for civility, not just in the midst of this single election, but in all of our discussions with one another, whether they are in the state and national political arena or just part of our discussions here at the church, in school, at work, or in the local community. I advanced to you an idea from writer Parker Palmer who suggests that because we get hurt in life (and who doesn't?), we tend to turn our hurt on others, creating a kind of detrimental domino effect that results in anger, frustration, and even withdrawal from those around us who would otherwise be thought to be friends and neighbors. It was Palmer who said that when we our hearts are broken, it is up to us to see that our hearts are broken open rather than broken apart, so that we can continue to be part of our community and so that our pain can be turned into something profitable for everyone as we come together, rather than be torn apart.<sup>1</sup> I also predicted that there would be many hearts broken this week when the election returns were all in and counted.

Some of you are ecstatic about the outcome of the election. You may even yet be gloating over the victory. Shame on you. That is no way to teach our children how to win in any competition. Your hearts are not broken. Your hearts have been hardened to the hurt of others. Stop gloating. Now. Your candidate won. The election is over. It's time to move on. And it's time to put that energy into finding ways to build community rather than continue to break it down.

Some of your hearts have been broken apart rather than open because your candidate did not realize victory. You can test whether your hearts are broken apart rather than open by giving some thought to what your next steps will be. Anger? Revenge? A digging of heels into the sand? Then shame on you too. Your hearts have hardened as well. You put all of your eggs into one basket and the majority, however close the vote, did not agree with you. If you continue in that line of thinking, you will put your energy into retribution, revenge, rather than finding ways to build community.

Because I have mentioned Abraham Lincoln several times in recent sermons, I want to return to him at least once more as we continue our discussions about how we can discover and live out civility in our daily lives.

I heard a few years ago Doris Kearns Goodwin speak about Lincoln as a result of her research for a book on his political career.<sup>2</sup> She said that when his mother and sister died, there was no discussion at the time of an “after life.” And he came to conclude that the only way he could live on after his own death would be “through the reputation he left behind” and he had a real fear he wouldn't live long enough to allow his ambition for success and legacy to be accomplished. In this way, I suppose, we could conclude that Lincoln felt driven to accomplish something of great worth for which he would be remembered, and that being elected President of the United States wasn't enough. He had to take responsibility as the leader of our Nation to create and manage the change necessary for the country to move forward.

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<sup>1</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy, The Courage to Create a Politics worthy of the Human Spirit*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, from a speech to the Midwest Legislative Conference, Chicago, 8-23-2006.

Right out of the shoot, Lincoln did something that was unthinkable in political circles then and, most of the time, now. He looked to his opponents in the Republican primary for President and called upon these three men who really found Lincoln distasteful and undistinguished to serve in his cabinet. This “team of rivals”<sup>3</sup> consisted of New York senator William H. Seward who would become Lincoln’s secretary of state; Ohio governor Salmon P. Chase, who served as Lincoln’s secretary of the treasury; and “Missouri’s distinguished elder statesmen Edward Bates,” who Lincoln appointed to be attorney general. To add to the surprise of appointing political enemies to serve in his cabinet, Republican President Lincoln called on three Democrats, Gideon Welles, Montgomery Blair, and Edwin M. Stanton, to serve as secretary of the navy, postmaster general, and secretary of war respectively. All of these men were “better known, better educated, and had more experience in public life than Lincoln.”<sup>4</sup>

But what the president accomplished in these appointments was to “turn his opponents into allies.” At first, his secretary of state tried to undermine him, but as the president’s term progressed, they became “fast friends.” The secretary of the treasury was “haunted by the desire to become president” himself, but he grew in his respect for Lincoln as they worked together and he witnessed Lincoln’s leadership. And, at first, war secretary Stanton “snubbed Lincoln due to his appearance and attire. But it was Stanton who, perhaps, grieved most deeply for the president when he was killed.”<sup>5</sup>

The issue here that concerns us today is how it is that Lincoln would or could possibly overlook the unabashed opposition of all of these men and appoint them to such positions of power in his administration, appoint them to such sensitive slots that they could easily have condemned Lincoln’s presidency rather than help him leave the legacy he so dearly desired.

Goodwin suggests several criteria for this kind of leadership which, I suggest to you, are all essential for reclaiming civility among ourselves and demanding it of our leaders:

1. Lincoln had a “quiet self confidence.” He was humble.
2. He had a “remarkable capacity for understanding ideas other than his own.
3. He believed that “denunciation leads to denunciation.” Or, as I have put it earlier, anger leads to revenge.
4. Lincoln believed that he had to “reach into people’s hearts;” that “empathy allowed him to share credit” for any and all ideas which he might well have claimed for his own.
5. He stood up to his critics, without doubt, but he also took the blame for mistakes and didn’t pass that blame on to anyone else.
6. President Lincoln also knew of the necessity to restore his own strength. After visits to the battlefield and walking among the wounded, he would take time away. During his presidency, Lincoln “went to the theatre a hundred times. He knew he couldn’t continue to take the pressure without safety valves.”<sup>6</sup>

In our scripture today, we find Samuel who has been an excellent judge, a leader of the Hebrew people and chosen for that position by God. Judges weren’t kings or presidents as we think of them; they certainly didn’t wield that kind of power. They governed more by mediation or by helping the Hebrew tribes build community which meant negotiating justice for all and a disdain for favors or preference for the privileged. His sons became judges as well, but they weren’t good at it and the people became restless. So they looked to neighboring nations and

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<sup>3</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals, The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Goodwin, p. xvi

<sup>5</sup> Goodwin, speech

<sup>6</sup> Goodwin, speech

tribes who were not God's so-called people and discovered that those folks did not have judges, they had kings. And the people decided that what they wanted was a king.

Samuel felt terrible about this. He felt he had let God down because it seemed that the people were turning from God's plan to their own. And, indeed, that's what they were doing. But God told Samuel not to take this personally. God said the people were not turning on Samuel for anything he had done wrong, but they were rejecting God who was their true king and demanding a human king. The message Samuel relayed to the people from God can pretty much be summed up by saying, "Be careful what you pray for." God knew and knows that human beings are easily led astray, that they crave power, and love money. And because human beings all make mistakes, the people could expect that any leader they had of their own choosing or chosen by other human beings would lead to their greater distress, not their peace and justice.

The story, of course, is that the people got their king, the first in what would be a very long monarchy and all because they thought that doing it the way they saw others doing it would somehow be better than allowing God to rule in their lives. They wanted to be like everybody else, and God permitted it to happen. They turned from being a community centered around worship of God to a community centered around human citizenship in a human-led government.

Now, if it weren't for the likes of Abraham Lincoln and a handful of other truly great human leaders throughout history, we would certainly be in a whole lot worse condition than we are now, and that seems impossible to imagine. You and I have been just like the people Israel who turned from God and put their trust completely in human leadership.

It just doesn't work. And what we can learn from Lincoln is that regardless of how we feel about our opponents whether they are political or at work or school or live next door or in the same house, there are matters of integrity, of civility that are required if we are not only to peacefully co-exist, but build a community whether that is of one or two or a family or a church, village, or a nation.

Peter Block suggests in his book *Community*, that a community's well-being is dependent upon social capital. "Social capital is about acting on and valuing our interdependence and sense of belonging. It is the extent to which we extend hospitality and affection to one another. . . . we need to create a community where each citizen has the experience of being connected to those around them and knows that their safety and success are dependent on the success of all others."<sup>7</sup> He says what we have in our country today is a context that "markets fear, assigns fault, and worships self-interest." He says that as citizens of this country, we have allowed our candidates for public office to become objects of marketing and that makes us consumers. He contends we need to turn that around. That we need to build our community together, come together in our differences, determine together what it is that we want to accomplish and then we find the leader to help us do that.

What we have been doing is sitting around waiting for potential leaders to tell us what we ought to do and then we can blame them when everything goes wrong. If you and I were to work together, truly listening to one another, and turning to scripture, to God for our direction, we would have to take responsibility ourselves rather than finding someone else to blame. But in the midst of this idea of building social capital in our church and in our community, we would be doing exactly what Abraham Lincoln did when he built his team of rivals to help him lead this country: we would be listening carefully to one another, we would give extra effort toward understanding one another's ideas and opinions, we would stop condemning one another and always work to build one another up, and we would stop blaming other people for everything that's wrong in this country.

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Block, *Community*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2008

And, finally, or perhaps foremost, *our* emphasis on restoring our own souls so that we have the strength to be civil in our dealings with one another would be to put God first in our lives rather than isolated to a Sunday morning worship or not present at all.

So, folks, open your broken hearts to one another, whether they have been recently broken through an election or broken through a world of other means. Be careful what you pray for, because when it comes to human leadership, we will always be disappointed, and God may permit that to happen. The only leader to whom we can look for sure and certain authority on how to behave, how to lead, how to respond to being hurt, and how to be civil to one another is our Lord Jesus Christ. If we follow his example and command to love God with our hearts, minds and strength and love our neighbors as ourselves, we can, once again, discover what it means to live in a community that responds to God's requirement to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

Amen..

## 1 Sermon, September 18, 2011

Texts: 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, Matthew 18:18-22, Isaiah 54:9-17

Title: "Finding Christ at the Center: Seeing All Sides"

When I was young, my parents instilled some very strong values in me:

1. Try to see the other side
2. Don't call unnecessary attention to yourself – that's vanity
3. Don't think you're superior to others
4. Don't complain unless you really have to
5. Try to work within the system

These values were never listed out like this, but I learned them nonetheless.

I learned to try to see the other side because whenever I came home with a problem with someone else, my Mom tried to get me to think about how they saw things, or to sympathize with problems they might have. She'd say, "Now, Jim, think about how they must feel . . ."

I learned not to call attention to myself because my parents never bragged, and never tried to show off.

I learned not to think I was superior to others because that was a message drilled into me from my parents. My parents let me know that just because I got better grades than some other people, that didn't make me better than them. Just because I was going to go to college didn't mean that non-college jobs were any less important. Jesus was a carpenter; he didn't go to college.

I learned not to complain, because when we were in a restaurant, even when my mother didn't like something, she never complained, but just made do, maybe not eating it.

I learned to work within the system because my parents believed that you could work within the system. They voted, and trusted that this was one of the best ways to change things. They believe that some things ought to be changed, but they have never been activists.

Over time, I learned that not everyone was raised the way I was.

Some parents taught their children to call attention to themselves. They'd say, get noticed; that's how you get ahead.



## 2 Sermon, September 18, 2011

Other parents taught their children about the value of money, and how to make a profit. They taught their children to look at the world in terms of opportunities. The children learned to out-think other people, always be a step ahead, anticipate the actions of others.

Some parents taught complaining. They didn't *try* to teach complaining, but they did just by virtue of complaining all the time. So the children grew up with the attitude that the world owed them something; the world should be better than it is.

Some parents taught their children that they were to find the thing they were great at, and really excel. They might be smarter, or quicker, or stronger, or have more stamina. They might be great athletes, great musicians, great actors, but there was some way in which they were better than others. They should take advantage of it.

Even as an adult, I am sometimes surprised by people's values that are so different from mine. And here I am, leading a church, filled with people who have very different values from each other, and trying to get them to work together, and be at peace. In fact, I'm trying to get them to be *peacemakers*. After all, I was raised to get along with people.

I marvel at Jesus, how he was able to hold together a group of disciples that was so diverse. Peter, Andrew, James and John were simple fishermen. Matthew was a wealthy tax collector. Nicodemus and Lazarus were some of the followers of Christ, one a powerful Pharisee, the other raised from the dead. There was Mary Magdalene, who early tradition calls a wealthy woman. Finally, there is Judas the sicarii – sicarii is Latin for a kind of knife by which some radicals cut the throats of any Roman soldiers they could.

Why did such a diverse group surround Jesus? How did he make it work? The Bible tells us they didn't always get along; that James and John wanted special places in Jesus' coming kingdom, and the other disciples were quite angry about that.

The Bible is a witness to the variety of opinion; in fact, you could say that Jesus was put to death for having a different opinion.

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At the same time, the Bible is witness to how God calls together into his Kingdom some very different characters, and calls them to work together.

Listen again to the reading from 1 Corinthians:

**10**My dear friends, as a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ, I beg you to get along with each other. Don't take sides. Always try to agree in what you think. **11**Several people from Chloe's family have already reported to me that you keep arguing with each other. **12**They have said that some of you claim to follow me, while others claim to follow Apollos or Peter or Christ. **13**Has Christ been divided up? Was I nailed to a cross for you? Were you baptized in my name?

Christ has not been divided up. Christ is the same, even though many different leaders tell about him in different ways. We know that Paul and Peter were very different, and we assume that this Apollos who Paul mentions was still different from them. Yet all three were teaching about the same Jesus.

The Bible has a strong freedom tradition, stemming from Moses' call to the Pharaoh to "Let my people go." Jesus himself talked about liberating the oppressed, and setting the captives free. You could say that part of the Bible is written from the perspective of the poor, asking for justice from the rich and powerful.

—Hear what the prophet Samuel tells the people when they ask for a king:

~~He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plough his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves." 1 Samuel 8:10-17, NIV.~~

The Bible has another tradition, which you find the book of Proverbs, and scattered throughout the scriptures, that takes a look at

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things from the perspective of the powerful, and asks: "How do we faithfully exercise power?"

Solomon asks for wisdom to rule his kingdom, and God grants it.

"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God." Psalms 92:12, 13, NIV.

The word "righteous" refers to someone with power trying to use it well. Righteousness is about choosing to treat others well:

"If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered." Proverbs 21:13, NIV.

The Bible has something to say to labor and something to say to management. The book of Proverbs, especially, is sensitive to those who are in charge of a small plot of land, AND those who employ hundreds of people.

How does that speak to the protests at the capitol earlier this year? Well, it doesn't paint a black and white picture, with one side all right and the other all wrong.

Instead, the scriptures ask what is righteous: what is the best exercise of power that honors commitments, that shares in sacrifice, that builds relationships? If people rely on one another, how can those relationships be preserved?

The title of today's sermon is: "Finding Christ at the Center: Seeing All Sides."

Maybe that's a naïve title. None of us can completely see all sides. But it is in coming to the center that we can come closest to Jesus. This means that when we're able to leave aside the shrill rhetoric, and really listen to each other, we're more able to hear the voice of God.

It's not easy. We are so different from each other.

But it is in finding what is common that we find what runs deep down inside each of us, and those deep down yearnings, those deep down longings for love and justice were put there by God.

The hot-button issues of today are really all about deeply held values and yearnings.

Abortion can be fuel for loud arguments, but that's because we're asking about what value life has, and when does it start, and is my body sacred and do I have control over it?

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The debate over abortion is a debate where we should be able to honor each other's deeply held values.

Likewise, Gun control and Concealed carry are hot button issues because they relate to deeply held values, like: how do I preserve my freedom, and how do I keep my community safe, and what do I believe about violence?

I could list many more issues that divide us, and show how they are really about deeply held values. And if we were able to *really hear* the values of the other person, we'd say – "So that's what you mean! I don't agree with you, because my values are a little different. But I see why you think that way."

And that's what the apostle Paul meant by "agreeing with one another, and not taking sides. That's what is meant by the word unity when it's used in the New Testament.

There is truly power in this kind of coming together and understanding each other. I think that's why Jesus said,

Again I assure you that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, then my Father who is in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them."

Amen.

### **1 Corinthians 1:10-13**

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

**10** My dear friends, as a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ, I beg you to get along with each other. Don't take sides. Always try to agree in what you think. **11** Several people from Chloe's family [**a**] have already reported to me that you keep arguing with each other. **12** They have said that some of you claim to follow me, while others claim to follow Apollos or Peter [**b**] or Christ. **13** Has Christ been divided up? Was I nailed to a cross for you? Were you baptized in my name?

### **1 Corinthians 1:10-13**

New International Version (NIV)

**10** I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, [**a**] in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you

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say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. **11** My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. **12** What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas[**b**]"; still another, "I follow Christ."

**13** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?

### **Matthew 18:18-22**

New International Version (NIV)

**18** "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be[**a**] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be[**b**] loosed in heaven.

**19** "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

**21** Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

**22** Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.[**c**]

### **Matthew 18:18-22**

Common English Bible (CEB)

**18** I assure you that whatever you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. And whatever you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven. **19** Again I assure you that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, then my Father who is in heaven will do it for you. **20** For where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them."

**21** Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?"

**22** Jesus said, "Not just seven times, but rather as many as seventy-seven times.[**a**]

# Finding words that give grace

Ephesians 4:25-5:2;

John 6:35, 41-51

August 12, 2012,

Rev. Phil Haslanger

Memorial United Church of Christ, Fitchburg

*O let me be your light to the nations, whatever others may have done,  
with unkind words, with a gun, let me rise up like the sun  
and shine your love all the way to the ends of the earth.*

(Christopher Grundy)

(For a list of the resources mentioned in this sermon, click here -  
<http://www.memorialucc.org/about-us/469>)

We sang that song by Christopher Grundy a few weeks ago here after the shootings at the movie theater in Aurora, Colorado as a way to offer a bit of light in the darkness of that horrible event.

Here we are, singing it again after another mass shooting - this one only 90 miles from here, this one on a Sunday morning at a place of worship.

*“Whatever others may have done with unkind words.”*

Just think of all the unkind words that are part of the white power movement that Wade Michael Page immersed himself in over the years. The songs he sang were not songs of shining God’s love all the way to the ends of the earth, but songs reflecting the depths of hate that pervade the lives of those who find their meaning in despising others.

And *“whatever others may have done with a gun?”* The gun in the hands of Wade Michael Page tore into the lives not only of the six people he killed – and then was used to take his own life.

The gun in his hands tore into the fabric of a community – a religious community in Oak Creek, a human community that gathered over and over in the past week in solidarity with one

another, whether they were Sikh or Christian, Jewish or Muslim, atheist or Hindu or Buddhist.

We all sought to rise up like the sun on the day after this tragedy and on the day after that and once again this morning.

I can't imagine a better selection of scripture for a day like today than this little passage that Mary read from the letter to the early Christian church at Ephesus. It just happened to be the reading selected for use on this Sunday by the vast array of churches that follow what we call the lectionary – a three-year cycle of readings from the Bible.

I think it can speak to us not only in the aftermath of a mass murder in a temple but in the more routine but more slowly destructive ways we use words to destroy one another. It can speak to us about channeling our anger, sharing our goods and finding touchstones for what it means to live as followers of Jesus.

First, just a bit of context for this letter. It was written a little later than some of the letters collected in the New Testament. The Christian communities were becoming more established. The struggles were not so much to set themselves apart from the Jewish community they had emerged from, but to stand in distinction from the Greek and Roman world that surrounded them. What would make Christians different from the broader culture?

And this letter, while called the letter to the Ephesians, was probably written by a follower of Paul to be circulated among a wide number of early Christian communities as they all struggled with how to apply the meaning of Jesus' life and teaching in their own settings.

It starts with speaking truth to one another, not because we want to score points in some great debate, but because, the letter says, "we are members of one another." If we are not honest with each other, then we are not being honest with ourselves.

How we speak truth to one another matters, of course. This is not a call for blunt self-righteousness. It is a reminder that there are differences among us, that sometimes we see bad things happening and that we need to address them. Or, as the letter writer says, "Be angry, but do not sin."

I think we can sometimes pretend that being Christian means we should not give in to feelings of anger. This letter acknowledges not only that anger is a very real human emotion, but that it also has a place in our lives.

We should be angry when someone goes into a movie theater or a temple and starts shooting people. We should be angry when powerful people within business and within government are indifferent to the damage done to our earth by their actions.

We should be angry when people are pushed aside because of their race or ethnicity or sexual orientation or their economic status. We should be angry when the ruler of Syria wages war on his own people or the citizens of Palestine face daily humiliation at the hands of their occupiers. We should be angry.

What we do with that anger is critical. Rather than using that anger to demean others, to take away their humanity, we need to find ways to channel that anger into actions that will challenge injustice while preserving our integrity and the dignity of those we oppose.

There is not better example of that in our recent history than the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. It is not a perfect example, but it surely embodied the notion of being angry but in a way that sought to avoid adding new sins to the existing sin of racism and the violence it engendered.

There's a curious admonition in the midst of this passage. "Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands." I'm not sure what the issue was in the early church that prompted that. Were there really a lot of



early Christians who supported themselves by robbing others? I don't think so.

What's even more curious, though, is why thieves ought to start doing honest labor: "so as to have something to share with the needy." This is a recurring theme in the early Christian community.

You ought to be a responsible member of the community, earning your way as best you can. And then you ought to share what you earn with those who are not doing so well. It's that tension that we still live with today both in our own lives and in the political arena.

Have you heard the latest round of ads about welfare and work? Or have you followed the debates in the sharply different ways that two active Catholics – Joe Biden and Paul Ryan – interpret the reach social justice teachings that are part of both the Catholic and the wider Christian tradition?

Whatever your political viewpoint, the underlying tension is there. There is value in work. One side emphasizes that. There is value in sharing with those in need. The other side emphasizes that. The early Christian letter writer said that both are important.

In our contemporary political culture, there is not a lot of room for the phrase that comes next in this letter.

*"Let no evil come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear."*

One of the remarkable things for me over the past week in watching the reaction of the Sikh community to the shootings at their place of worship, to the deaths of their leaders and friends, has been the lack of evil words coming out of their mouths.

Grief, yes. Distress, yes. But vindictiveness? No. Somehow, in public at least, they have managed to rise way above the hatred that Wade Michael Page carried into their midst.

Even as they gathered in shock in the parking lot around their temple in Oak Creek, while the police were still searching the building, they set up an outdoor kitchen to serve food and water to the first responders and to the growing crowd of reporters who had gathered. It was their tradition of hospitality at work.

And then listen to these words from Harpreet Singh Kapur, a member of the Sikh Temple in Oak Creek: “No matter what the shooter did, he failed, because instead of pulling us apart, he made us closer... We didn’t realize that we have such support from other members of society until this happened... We feel more close to other faiths and other religions now more than ever before.”

As the letter to the Ephesians said: *“Let no evil come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.”*

If the Sikh community could act and speak that way after such a horrendous assault, then should not we as followers of Jesus also be paying attention to ways to make our words give grace to others?

Within our community at Memorial, we have done a good job of that over the years. We have tackled difficult issues with care and respect for one another. This is one of the ways, just as it was for the early Christian communities, we can be a model for the wider society of how to handle disagreement.

We can be honest with one another without being destructive, we can work our way through differences while holding together as members of the body of Christ.

As many of you know, the Wisconsin Council of Churches has launched a statewide effort this fall called a Season of Civility. You can read more about that in the bulletin today. It’s designed to create safe places for respectful conversations across partisan

divides. In other words, how can we find words that give grace to others?

There are some good resources for this. I have mentioned before a book by Madison author Parker Palmer called *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit*. That book is at the foundation of the Season of Civility Project. A group of us here had a book group discussion of it earlier this year and if there is interest, we could have another one this fall.

If you want a more challenging read, try Jonathan Haidt's *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*. He uses the field of moral psychology to explore these divides and to offer ways to at least understand one another.

There are links to both of these books and to some videos and interviews with the authors on our web site if you want to explore those ideas further.

But let me cite one other person who offered some very concrete ideas for political dialogue. I think his ideas fit into the wider question of how we choose words that give grace to others.

Charles Camosy teaches Christian ethics at Fordham University in New York. Last month, he wrote a column for *The Seattle Times* that I came across while sitting at my cousin's kitchen table out there. It was called "Five Tips for a Civic Discourse."

Here they are in brief. I think they are helpful whether we are engaging public issues or personal disputes. (There is also a link to the whole column on our web site.)

First, he calls for humility as we enter into contentious subjects. He writes: "We are finite, flawed beings and are prone to making serious mistakes." Or there's my mantra – "Yes, that's what I think, but I could be wrong."

Second, he calls for solidarity with our conversation partner. Assume you might learn something from the other person. Get to know them a bit personally if you do not know them already. Don't demonize them just because they disagree with you. Or as the writer of the letter to the Ephesians put it, "do not make room for the devil."

Third, says Camosy, don't reduce every issue to having only two sides. Things are more complex than that.

Fourth, stay away from dismissive words and phrases like "radical feminist" or "war on women" or "tree hugger" or "anti-science."

And finally, lead with what you are for rather than with what you think the other person is against. You may find that you have similar ultimate goals and the disagreement is more about how to get there. That leaves room for both of you to give a little in the conversation.

Is this a foolproof way of finding words that give grace to others? Of course not. But it's a start.

Would this approach have worked with Wade Michael Page? Of course not. We need to be on alert for those whose hatred of others runs so deep, whose mental balance is so distorted, that they threaten others. But thank goodness, the Wade Michael Pages of the world are rare in our society.

In the end, according to the letter writer to the early Christian communities, what we need to do is give up those things that we use as defense mechanisms to separate us from others – bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander and malice.

Instead, we need to embrace kindness, to be tender hearted, to learn forgiveness just as Jesus showed us how to forgive and showed us the abundance of God's love and grace and forgiveness.

That's not work that is done in a day. It's not work that ever ends. But on this day, we can recommit to rejecting the things that divide us and embracing the things that give grace to ourselves and to others.

We can do that in many ways, but one way is by singing again the song we began with. In the midst of whatever hatred and violence we encounter in our world, let us be like the rising sun and shine God's light to all the ends of the earth.

## Beelzebul and the Blame Game

Lectionary 10: Genesis 3:8-15; Mark 3:20-35, 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Hymn: *Christ is Alive! Let Christians Sing!* (ELW #389)

Time after Pentecost – 10 June 12

Rev. Nick Utphall

St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, ELCA

Ah, playing the ol' blame game.

This 1<sup>st</sup> reading from Genesis isn't so much how ancient predecessors introduced original sin into our genetic make-up. Yet it's probably such an enduring story because it really is the prototype for so much of our behavior, which is unfortunate in showing how quickly accusations fly and make us all victims. Nobody comes out smelling like roses.

It begins with the serpent instigating some distrust of God, which is played out with the woman and the man disobeying God and eating the fruit. God confronts this disobedience, and then come repercussions, both in God's response to their actions and in their own response. And their response is filled with blame. The man not only blames the woman, but also blames God, saying, "The woman *you gave me* told me to eat." The woman, in turn, blames the serpent. This is the unending slippery slope of the blame game, everyone accusing and everyone victimized.

This story has had huge influence not just on our religious views, but all of culture. It may or may not play into our common dislike for slimy serpents, viewing them as sneaky or even evil. Certainly it has had terrible, tragic consequences for women in society. Women have been constantly burdened with the man's blame, expanded into a notion of being somehow weaker and more susceptible to

temptation. This story has been mustered to foster male-dominated hierarchies, pretending that men are somehow more blameless and more discerning.

That, first of all, contradicts the story. The woman is the one who ponders the theological argument and makes a decision, while the man is mostly passive, portrayed almost like a hungry baby. But, much more to the point, when this story is used to blame women it just shows the unfortunate reality this prototypical story tries to portray in the first place, of accusing and victimizing, of refusing to move on, to reconcile, to work together. Instead it dwells in the past and tries to make that define the future.

You see, we use blame to put a box around offenders and say that some previous action must be an indicator, a predictor of other future misbehavior. It's a prejudice that presumes guilt, and we just continue feeding into that stinky trap, that slippery slope of the blame game. It is not just this denigration of serpents or of women; the blame and accusations and subsequent breakdown of relationships keep right on spreading throughout our culture. This sad isolationism appears by blaming Mexican immigrants of stealing jobs. It's in the accusation that homosexual relationships are a threat to heterosexual marriage. It is on airlines that pull aside anybody with a hint of being Arabic or Muslim, as immediately suspect of perpetrating another September 11<sup>th</sup>. Youth feel it, and so do the aged. Blame's tentacles grope ever wider, always after more victims.

And all the while, it makes us worse off. The response of falling back into self-defense and fear provides an illusion of safety, of security, of keeping the bad at bay, while in reality there is none of that. As Eve and Adam find, excuses and accusations simply aren't a helpful remedy. Indeed, systems of blame end up as spiraling snares that compound our guilt and make it harder to correct, to straighten it out and restore right, harder to say, "oops." Once you've demonized Ahmadinejad, you can't easily turn around and want to cooperate with Iran to

achieve a desirable end. Even though it will make things worse, we are trapped by past blame.

That is the same with our hyper-partisan politics, as we've had extra opportunity to notice, in constant adversarial language of opponents and "dropping the bomb" and declaring war and taking sides and, supposedly ultimately, of somehow claiming victory. Yet when the whole system is built on blame, on how terrible and wrong the other side is, it will continue to obstruct any future movement, any positive development. It is only about heated confrontation and entrenched resistance, tearing itself apart.

We reach similar dead ends with those around us. We take offense. An argument devolves into never agreeing again. Once a stain becomes permanent, it is tough to start over. We withdraw our trust, remaining constantly at odds, filled with enmity. The relationship is destroyed.

The story from Genesis reminds us this is not primarily a problem related to gender equality or family conflict, nor just terrorists and political hostages, but originates in our relationship with God. The man went so far as to blame God for giving him the woman in the first place. That is the sorry extent of the blame game, when everybody has ended up a loser. The woman, this best relationship, this delightful partner that God created, this one who, when he first met her, made the man exclaim, "At last!" now instead has been rejected, turned away. The best gifts God gives instead become objects of mistrust and we hide under the false pretense that we are victims because of God's graciousness. It's the cruel irony that while we imagine we are defining and defending ourselves, we end up instead just rejecting and turning away from the goodness God was intending for us to begin with. In the trap of blaming and walling off and breaking down of relationships, we are in fact refusing to let God be God, refusing to accept God's goodness.



This is what Jesus is talking about today, and what he has come to change, a mission of overcoming the Satan. By definition, Satan is the Accuser. In Hebrew it means the Accusing One. This satanic work isn't the villainous arch-nemesis of God, not some snakey, sly devil figure as the ultimate embodiment of evil. Rather, Satan is the blaming and accusing that turns us against each other and away from trusting God's goodness.

As our Gospel reading begins today, some people are trying, not surprisingly, to draw Jesus into the blame game, in to this constant rivalry of disagreements, of always noticing differences and accusing new opponents. Even his family bought into the accusations. People were calling Jesus Beelzebul, which is name-calling at its sharpest. Beelzebul means "Lord of Dung." The closely related Baalzebub is "Lord of the Flies." It's an Old Testament name to mock foreign idols, by saying, "That so-called god you're devoted to is only master over a pile of stink, and you followers are like flies on that stink." It is, of course, ironic that when they try to dump this stinky name on Jesus they are not only condemning God's work of renewing life, but it is they themselves who come out not smelling so rosy.

For his part, Jesus won't play that game. He points out that the whole structure of society, this system of blame and name-calling and boundaries to keep away outsiders, this entire structure of fear masquerading as security, is bound to collapse. "How can Satan drive out Satan?" he asks. Accusations only lead to more accusations, blame to further blame. There is no end to it. The whole house, divided against itself, won't be able to stand.

But Jesus hasn't just come to talk about that obvious truth. He doesn't just tell you to stop blaming, to take some individual responsibility, to talk nice and be civil, or even to try a little harder to appreciate the gift of God's goodness. It says he was casting out the demons. You don't need a mysterious, magical view for that. We try to demonize each other; Jesus stops that. These so-called monsters we keep

trying to push away, he restores into relationships as actual humans, even brothers and sisters.

More, Jesus says he's like a sneaky little thief who breaks into that house of divisions and he reclaims what that strong man has laid claim to, reclaims the goodness of life. And Jesus does this by undermining the power of the blame. He takes on the burden of the accusation so that Adam and Eve are not guilty. Nor are you guilty. Neither are those you're constantly trying to pick fights with. Jesus, the sneaky little thief, took all that guilt and died with it, as a criminal among thieves. As Psalm 69 says, in words that describe what Jesus does, "the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." He has taken the burden of your blame, and it died with him.

There is no sense in accusing or name-calling anymore, because it is just trying to insult a dead man who can take no offense. Blame is dead. There is no sting left to it. The power that the strong man had, the ensnaring force of these accusations, has been rendered impotent, worthless. Jesus stole it away and was buried with it. This divisive weapon of the Satan, the strength of accusations, is done. And from that dead pile of dung, surrounded by flies, out of that Jesus rose to refresh, to renew, to share the good gift of life. At last we get to God's response: God won't join the game of wielding blame against you, holding you to your faults; God simply declares you forgiven, freed of wrong, again to be right.

And now that is on the loose and moving forward. You're living in this kingdom of heaven that stands over against the crumbling, dead household of accusations. Instead of that ever increasing casting of blame, as 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians says, you are now part of spreading God's grace, extending it to more and more people. No longer part of the losing proposition of the blame game, you are part of this reconciliation game. Rather than pushing them further away, you can reach out to those who are different or offensive, the strangers and the outcasts. You

don't need to tally offenses, but may forgive insults because you have been brought again to see your identity and security doesn't rest in trying to be better than somebody else. No, you are assured your place in God's family, in this good household that is God's creation and your place in this family is guaranteed to be secure forever.

The Power of Speech  
James 3:1-10  
Rev. Lynne Spencer-Smith

In preparation for today's sermon, I ran across one commentary suggested that, after encountering this text from James a preacher might have the sudden urge to simply engage in a time of silent prayer in lieu of a sermon....<sup>1</sup>

We shall take some time in silence but, alas, not in lieu of the sermon... in addition to.

Please be with me in silence.

Silence is difficult for us, O God. You have given us the gifts of speech and voice and language and intellect but we don't always manage to put them together very well. But, in your wisdom, you also give us the gift of listening. Not just hearing but listening deeply. May these moments, the words spoken in them and the message that makes it through to our hearts be that which you would need us to hear and understand. Amen.

A US News and World Report study revealed that 90% of all Americans felt that the loss of civility is a serious problem in our country. According to the survey, we are no longer civil to each other, we treat each other rudely and show very little respect for one another. The survey also revealed that, although 90% of the population recognizes there is a serious problem with our nation's civility, 99% of Americans say that they themselves are civil. In other words, almost everyone agrees that people in this country are too rude and mean but only one person in every hundred is willing to admit that they are the culprit. Only 1% is willing to be honest and admit that they have the power to do something about it.<sup>2</sup>

By the way, the survey was taken in 1996. Sixteen years ago. In sixteen years, I can't say we've improved much and in the heat of what seems like the most contentious political season in our nation's history, the incivility is *not* limited to the candidates. If what shows up on my computer screen is any indication, I would guess that rarely a day goes by that there are not millions of inflammatory and hurtful comments uttered via email, Facebook, letters to editors, radio call-in shows, not to mention bumper stickers, and cable and network television. Just because the words are not being spoken from our mouths directly to another person, incivility is still incivility and it has crept its way into every aspect of our lives.

There is one word for it: Toxic. It's a poison that seeps slowly into our environment and is eating away at the foundation of our culture.

Could it be that the developers of the lectionary knew that this text from James would roll around somewhere around seven weeks before election day in the United States? I really don't think that they had that in mind at all but, it does seem to be rather timely. As the campaigns have gathered steam and continue to do so, candidates and supporters seem to be forgetting that we are considered part of the "civilized world," and a nation founded on "Christian principles." If the stuff that has been landing in my in box, coming across on Facebook, and showing up in any number of places and in any number of formats are examples of either civilization or Christianity, stop the bus now because I want to get off. None of it is admirable, complimentary or helpful.

What happened to the thing our mothers used to tell us... “if you can’t say anything nice, ... finish it .... don’t say anything at all.

As much as I’d like to blame the internet and social media, attempts to “bridle our tongues” are nothing new under the sun. These verses from the Book of James aren’t all that much... just 12 verses. But when you look at the whole book, there’s only five chapters. Twelve verses full of admonitions about taming the tongue is a lot of ink in five little chapters. James was written almost 2000 years ago. Apparently, civil speech has been a challenge for quite some time. Which simply means it’s one of those things we will always, always have to be working on. It’s a muscle we’ll have to train and use. It’s a skill that needs practice.... Like playing the piano or tennis, or singing, or prayer. The more you practice, the better at it you become. If you practice incivility, you become good at it. If you practice civility, exercise speaking graciously, complimentary, even speaking the hard truth with love, that is what you will become good at. The more we practice civil speech, the better we get at it and the more natural it becomes.

We may think that our speech is powerless, after all, remember the playground retort to insults... Sticks and stones can break my bones but... (finish it), words can never hurt me. Say that to the teen who is barraged daily in the halls at school. Say that to the colleague at work who just always seems to be a half a step off and overhears the comments coming over the wall of the cubicle. Say that to the woman who is beaten up with words on a regular basis. Say that to the family who grieves the suicide of someone who just couldn’t live with the those words that supposedly can’t hurt. Our words are powerful and the way we use them is just as much about how we live out our Christian vocation as praying, going on mission trips and tithing.

How we use our words is perhaps one of the most important choices we can make about our behavior. What comes out of our mouths, exported out of our out box or posted on our Facebook ultimately is not about that which we are expressing an opinion. What comes out of our thoughts and ends up being expressed in whatever form is ultimately a reflection on ourselves. Jesus reminded the religious leaders of his day that the mouth speaks that which is the abundance of the heart. (Matthew 12:34-37). Matthew tells us that Jesus said, “The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”<sup>3</sup>

Sticks and stones may very well break bones, but words can shatter the heart and soul, they can destroy lives. The rotten words can seep into the soul and poison the life right out of it.

So, I invite you to join me in the practice of faithful speaking where words are used to build people up, not tear them down; where speech, either spoken or written, hard-copy or electronic, reflects the goodness that God has given each of us; where the first words that come forth from us are words of praise and gratitude and where words that are issued as criticism are offered in compassion and mercy. Let us be the 1% who are committed to doing something to make a very important difference in the world today.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect\\_date=9/16/2012](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=9/16/2012), Sandra Hack Polaski

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<sup>2</sup> As referenced in *Charting the Course*, by Mark A. Powell, Sunday, Proper 19; referring to The US News and World Report, The American Uncivil Wars: **How crude, rude and obnoxious behavior has replaced good manners and why that hurts our politics and culture**  
By John Marks Posted 4/14/96

<sup>3</sup> <http://Jounerywithjesus.net/Essays/20090907JJ.shtml>

**Call for a Season of Civility in Wisconsin  
From our State's Religious Leaders**

We, the undersigned leaders in Wisconsin's faith communities, know that democracy thrives on open and vigorous debate about public policies. However, as Wisconsin struggles through another year of divisive campaigning and elections, we are concerned that hostile political rhetoric is overstepping the bounds of civility and even decency in our congregations and society at large.

By nature, religious congregations include people from all walks of life who hold differing views on political and social issues. The teachings of our religious traditions compel us to be concerned about the common good and the well-being of our neighbors. But we do not all agree on the means to achieve these ends.

Virtually every religious tradition includes some version of "the Golden Rule" – to treat others as we would like to be treated. Likewise, the idea of democracy is based on regard for the value of each and every individual.

Yet, as a result of the extreme political polarization in Wisconsin, many in our congregations and communities feel marginalized or demonized by their neighbors on account of their economic status, occupation or political beliefs. Politics in a democracy is not a zero-sum game or a winner-take-all contest. Rather, it is a joint effort to reach a workable consensus on how to advance the common good. But our ability to cooperate to solve common problems and achieve shared goals is now undermined by rampant disrespect, disinformation, distrust, and disregard for the interests and ideas of others.



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Because we believe that this situation is unacceptable in our public life, we commit ourselves to a Season of Civility:

- We will seek to model and support respectful and honest conversations on public issues within our congregations, assemblies, and other forums.
- We will make a genuine effort to understand the reasons for the views of those with whom we disagree and try to explain the grounds for our own positions clearly and without arrogance. Our goal will be to identify shared values and concerns, rather than to “win” arguments.
- We will be mindful of our own fallibility and keep our views open to correction and reconsideration without betraying our deepest convictions.

We encourage all of our fellow citizens, to likewise commit themselves to a Season of Civility:

- Our congregations should be places where civility is taught and practiced as together we seek to learn what our faith calls us to do and be in the world.
- Candidates should strive to adhere to high standards of civility, integrity and truthfulness and insist that the advertisements produced by their own campaigns, and those of third parties, do the same.
- In their campaign reporting and commentary, media should subject all claims and counterclaims to rigorous but fair scrutiny, checking facts, critiquing logic, evaluating sources, and providing context.
- As citizens we should all be critical consumers of media and advertising, questioning claims and resisting attempts to manipulate our emotions.

We offer this statement in the confidence that, if we embrace our faith traditions’ highest values of compassion and mutual respect, we will find ways to work with our differences and cooperate to fashion a healthier, livelier and more enduring democracy.

For a list of signatories and resources: [www.wichurches.org](http://www.wichurches.org)

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## A Season of Civility

In this election season, as Christians we are mindful of our call to be politically involved and to vote. There is a separation of church and state *but* not religion and politics! *AND* we also honor our religious sensibility which guides us to be mindful of **how and when and where we share our views....setting and timing and “audience” and words chosen matter!**

Here at **[insert your congregation’s name]** we welcome divergent thinking and a range of commitment. We are enhanced by our diversity and together we hold worship and prayer as sacred times of union in which we are encouraged to give voice to issues calling out for our attention. However, it is not appropriate to give voice to preference concerning candidates at such times.

We participate in the Wisconsin Council of Churches Covenant of Civility signed by over 175 religious leaders statewide. **(A copy is available on the back bench.)** To learn more about the Covenant and for more resources on Civility, visit [www.wichurches.org](http://www.wichurches.org) .

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Adapted with permission from an insert developed by the Session of Tippecanoe Church, Milwaukee, WI.



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## Selected Resources on Civility

### Books

- Bishop, Bill. *The Big Sort: Why Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart*. New York, NY. Mariner Books, 2009.
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- Schirch, Lisa and David Camp. *The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects: A Practical, Hands-On Guide*. Intercourse, PA. Good Books, 2007.
- Tannen, Deborah. *The Argument Culture: Stopping America's War of Words*. New York, NY. Random House, 1998.

### Websites

- [Being a Civil Voice in Uncivil Times](#). Resources from the United Church of Christ and Faithful Democracy, including "Tips for Faithful and Respectful Discussion."
- [Center for Courage and Renewal – Healing the Heart of Democracy Program](#). Action Circles based on Parker J. Palmer's *Healing the Heart of Democracy*
- [Civil Discourse Curriculum](#) from the Episcopal Office of Government Relations. A five-week curriculum to help better understand and practice civil discourse particularly as it relates to politics, policy, and legislation.

**[Everyday Democracy](#)** (Formerly Study Circles Resource Center). Helps people with different backgrounds and views talk and work together to create communities that work for everyone.

**[Faith and American Politics](#)**. Curriculum designed to introduce a set of skills designed to raise the level of respect and civility present in conversations involving faith and politics.

**[Lombard Mennonite Peace Center](#)**. One of LMPC's programs available to groups is a workshop in conflict transformation suitable for church retreat days, weekend community workshops, or as part of a weekly adult education series.

**[Moral Deliberation Resources](#)**: Resources for Congregations to Become Communities of Moral Deliberation (ELCA).

**[Oshkosh Civility Project](#)**. An *ad hoc* community-based group advancing the cause of civility in order to enhance interpersonal effectiveness in order to build and strengthen the social fabric of our shared community.

**[Patriocracy](#)**. A film that seeks to answer the questions: How bad is it in Washington? Has the political environment always been this angry, this gridlocked, this broken? And what can we do about it?

**[Public Agenda](#)**. Seeks to contribute to a democracy in which problem-solving triumphs over gridlock and inertia, and where public policy reflects the deliberations and values of the citizenry.

**[Public Conversations Project](#)**. Prevents and transforms conflicts driven by deep differences in identity, beliefs, or values.

**[Speak Your Peace](#)**, a civility project of Incurage Community Foundation (River Falls, WI), based on Nine Tools of Civility and the wish for the "peace" in "Speak Your Peace" to be taken to heart.

**[World Café](#)**. Using seven [design principles](#) and a simple [method](#), the World Café is a powerful social technology for engaging people in conversations that matter, offering an effective antidote to the fast-paced fragmentation and lack of connection in today's world.



## Capitol Report: Religious leaders launch 'Season of Civility' in this divisive political climate



MAY 22, 2012 5:45 AM • [JESSICA VANEGEREN | THE CAPITAL TIMES | \[JVANEGEREN@MADISON.COM\]\(mailto:JVANEGEREN@MADISON.COM\)](#)

Religious leaders from across the state are launching a program designed to encourage civility in the divisive political atmosphere heading into June's recall election and the November presidential contest.

"I think it is clear to everybody inside and outside the religious community that we are in a political divide," says Lutheran Bishop Bruce Burnside of Madison. "That's not a commentary on one political party or another. What's happening right now is an epidemic, and I believe the church has a role in addressing it."

Burnside joined more than 30 other religious leaders Monday in announcing a year-long "Season of Civility" initiative designed to tone down the political rhetoric by providing religious leaders with tips on how to engage their congregations in less hostile, more civil forms of conversation.

The effort, led by the Wisconsin Council of Churches and the Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee, cites the need to emphasize the "Golden Rule," the idea embraced by many faith traditions to treat others as you would like to be treated.

Rev. Scott Anderson, executive director of the Wisconsin Council of

Churches, says it was clear to him and others that the state's current political climate, which has been marked by highly partisan protests in Madison and rounds of recall efforts against lawmakers of both parties, including the June gubernatorial recall election, that family members and members of congregations were no longer talking to one another.

“Congregations have historically been safe places for people to talk politics,” says Anderson, who is credited with leading the Season of Civility effort. “Now there is a reluctance to discuss a number of topics out of a fear of being demonized or misunderstood. It may sound strange, but there is no safety right now (to discuss political differences) in the public square.”

Anderson says one of the most polarizing topics these days surrounds the size and role of government.

Since Gov. Scott Walker took office in January 2011, the idea that state government should be smaller was often cited as a reason his administration and the GOP-controlled Legislature gave for scaling back state aid to public education and subsidized state health care programs.

“We need to care for the most vulnerable and the weakest members in society and our government has an obligation to do that,” Burnside says. “When our government fails to do it, I think our churches have a role in facilitating it.”

He says the effort is not meant to attack Democratic or Republican lawmakers and is not a partisan effort. There are lawmakers from both parties committed to providing services, including health care, education and public assistance, Burnside notes.

But among the goals of the Season of Civility is one to encourage politicians to take up the cause. As described in a press release about the initiative, it is hoped candidates will “strive to adhere to high standards of civility, integrity and truthfulness and insist that the advertisements produced by their own campaigns, and those of third parties, do the same.”

Burnside says the economic downturn, uncertainty for older workers about retirement plans, concerns about health care costs and angst

among parents over whether their college graduate will find a job are worries that combine to drive a wedge in a community of people.

“When this happens, people begin to focus on taking care of themselves,” Burnside says. “They start to look for others to blame. When that happens, the way we communicate and reason with one another is changed.”

Linda Ketcham, executive director of Madison area Urban Ministry, says she joined the Season of Civility effort not as a reaction to the current divisive political atmosphere, but because of what she says has been a gradual decline in public discourse over the past 20 years.

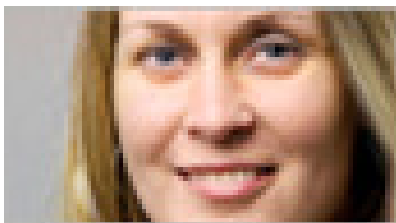
“How do we address homelessness? How do we address poverty?” she asks. “None of these issues are new with this governor or this Congress.”

She says it is now up to the faith community to put pressure on elected officials and raise awareness in congregations. “Until we address the tone of the debates, we will continue to fail on addressing the issues,” Ketcham says.

Anderson says the Wisconsin Council of Churches plans to mail information on the initiative to the 2,000 congregations and 5,000 individuals on its mailing list at the end of the week.

The mailing will include information on how religious leaders can support respectful and honest conversations on public issues and provide online links to sermon ideas for pastors leading up to the fall elections.

## Capitol Report blog



**Jessica Van Egeren**

Jessica is the State Capitol reporter for The Capital Times. She previously covered business in the Madison area and state government and politics in South Carolina.

**A contentious political year has prompted calls to bridge divides and restore civility in Wisconsin.**

## **Churches, groups urge reflection after recalls**

**By DOUG ERICKSON**

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Carol Grabins, a supporter of Republican Gov. Scott Walker, was watching election returns Tuesday at a bar in rural Dane County when she let out a whoop of excitement at the latest results.

A woman at a nearby table gave her the finger, and another yelled, "You're the reason my daughter and I will have to go on welfare."

That's when Grabins, who helped start the bipartisan, pro-civility group Reach Out Wisconsin, knew there was still a lot of work to do. "When we hurt, we lash out," she said.

The recall election, in which Walker defeated Democrat Tom Barrett, thrilled many Wisconsinites but plunged others into despair. Now some organizations, particularly churches, are stepping in to give people a place to cool off, reflect and, especially in liberal Madison, heal.

Sixteen people attended a "post-election prayer service" Wednesday night at Memorial United Church of Christ in

Please see **RECALLS**, Page **A6**

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JOHN HART — State Journal

The Rev. Twink Jan-McMahon, an associate pastor at Memorial United Church of Christ in Fitchburg, lights candles before a post-election prayer service Wednesday night. After a contentious political year, some Madisonarea churches are promoting messages of healing, forgiveness and civility.

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Supporters of Republican Gov.

Scott Walker celebrate his win late Tuesday at the Capitol, where they were greatly outnumbered.

At left is Frank Manning, 18, of Deerfield. The man holding the sign refused to give his name.

**Article Continued Below**

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[See RECALLS on Page A06](#)



## Recalls

Continued from Page A1

Fitchburg. The event sought to comfort all those “who have had their lives, their well-being and their relationships torn asunder by the political machinations of the last year,” said the Rev. Phil Haslanger.

During a time for public prayers, one man said he hoped people on both sides could find the strength to voice their opinions without fear. Another prayed for families riven by politics. Haslanger lifted up the names of Walker and Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch, praying that they lead “with wisdom and a spirit of finding common ground.”

Diane Eddings of Middleton, a social worker who said she took Barrett’s loss “very personally,” was glad the Republican office holders were mentioned. “It’s putting aside political differences and focusing on them as human beings and the enormity of the job they have to do.”

Becky Rice, an administrative assistant from Fitchburg, said she spent the time contemplating how liberals can best move their cause forward. It’s not through the “chains” of bitterness, she said. “If we keep demonizing people, the anger will just eat us alive.”

This Sunday, the Rev. Karen Gustafson will lead two services at First Unitarian Society in Madison, a largely liberal congregation, intended to address “Wisconsin’s divided community.” The services were planned before Election Day, Gustafson said, but she was struck by their need when she saw a post-election map of state voting patterns. “It is clear there are some things about the way the rest of Wisconsin thinks or believes that we don’t understand very well in Madison,” she said. “That’s certainly part of the task as we move forward, to recognize that the only way we are going to get to a deeper understanding is to engage in a different conversation. We need to talk to people who don’t agree with us.”

Both Haslanger and Gustafson are fans of the Wisconsin Council of Churches’ “call for a season of civility,” signed by a growing number of religious leaders, 143 so far. It calls on people to make a genuine effort to understand opposing viewpoints and to state their own positions “without arrogance.”

Churches need to be safe places for people to talk about difficult issues, especially now when “that safety is no longer present in the wider culture,” said the Rev. Scott Anderson, the council’s executive director.

The Rev. Nic Gibson, pastor of High Point Church in Madison and a Walker supporter, said it was often difficult for himself and others in the months leading up to the recall

election to get the opportunity to explain the moral reasoning behind their conservative positions. Opponents cut them off or publicly maligned them, he said.

“I’m all for civility,” he said, “but only if it’s with an eye toward creating something better for November, not as an apology after the fact.”

He won’t be addressing the election from the pulpit Sunday. “I have always told my parishioners not to put their hope in government,” he said. “Every politician breaks your heart.”

Grabins, the co-founder of Reach Out Wisconsin, recommends that friends or family members with opposing views take a break from discussing politics for a while. She’s checked in with her liberal friends but kept the conversation to personal matters.

The next meeting of Reach Out Wisconsin, set for 6 p.m. June 19 at Kavanaugh’s Esquire Club in Madison, will avoid the election entirely. Instead, liberal and conservative participants will try to come to a consensus on how best to create jobs.



JOHN HART — State Journal

Carol Williams, left, and Winton and Tammy Boyd reflect during a postelection prayer service Wednesday at Memorial United Church of Christ in Fitchburg. The Rev. Phil Haslanger urged attendees to remember the prophet Micah’s message: Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.

## **SEASON of CIVILITY: Clergy call for reconciliation in wake of political divide**

As Wisconsin continues to struggle through another year of divisive campaigning and elections, church leaders are voicing concerns that hostile political rhetoric is overstepping the bounds of civility, even decency.

A group of 35 religious leaders from throughout Wisconsin are calling upon citizens to enter a "Season of Civility" amidst the partisan rancor of the recall campaigns and the anticipated divisiveness of the fall election cycle.

"As a result of extreme political polarization in Wisconsin, many in our congregations and communities feel marginalized or demonized by their neighbors on account of their economic status, occupation, or political beliefs," a statement from the group says.

Rev. Scott Anderson, executive director of the Wisconsin Council of Churches, which represents 14

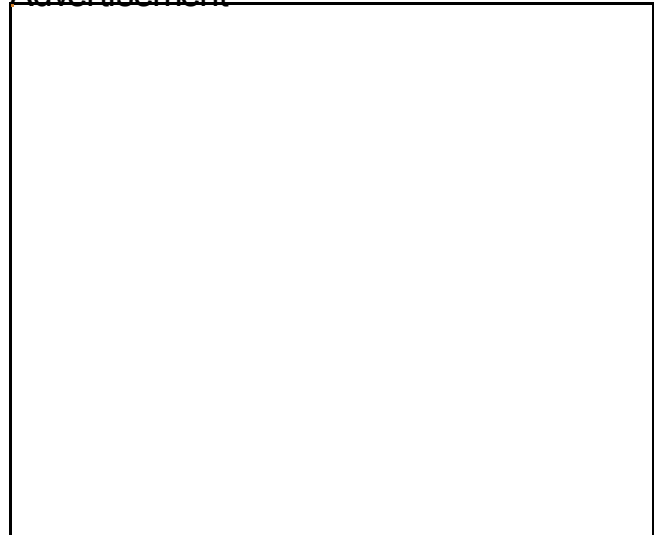
Christian denominations, commented that "politics is not a zero sum game or a winner-take-all contest. Rather it is a joint effort to reach a workable consensus on how to advance the common good. From the perspective of Wisconsin's religious community, the current political environment is unacceptable in our public life."

### **Local clergy react**

"I applaud the statement and those leaders who signed it," said Father Vic Capriolo from Holy Family Catholic Parish.

"The sentiments expressed are most appropriate in the light of all the attack ads the electorate were subjected to during the election just completed," he said. "I dread seeing what the upcoming national campaign will bring. The truth is hard to find and

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the 'Golden Rule' has all but been totally disregarded. If anyone can come up with a foolproof way to achieve the expressed goals of this season of civility, that individual should receive the Nobel Peace prize."

The "Call for a Season of Civility" statement declares that the "ability to cooperate to solve common problems and achieve shared goals is now undermined by rampant disrespect, disinformation, distrust and disregard for the interests and ideas of others."

Calling for change, it draws a parallel between the religious values embodied in the "Golden Rule" — to treat others as we would like to be treated — with the idea of democracy, which is based on regard for the value of each and every individual.

Pastor Ken Nabi of Community Church in Fond du Lac quotes a Bible verse from the book of Romans that states: "For the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: if you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor."

"The law is to be honored and respected and in our democratic process, the value of morality must

undergird all of our discussion and decisions," he said. "Democracy will only work when we value one another above our differences even when these differences are passionately held."

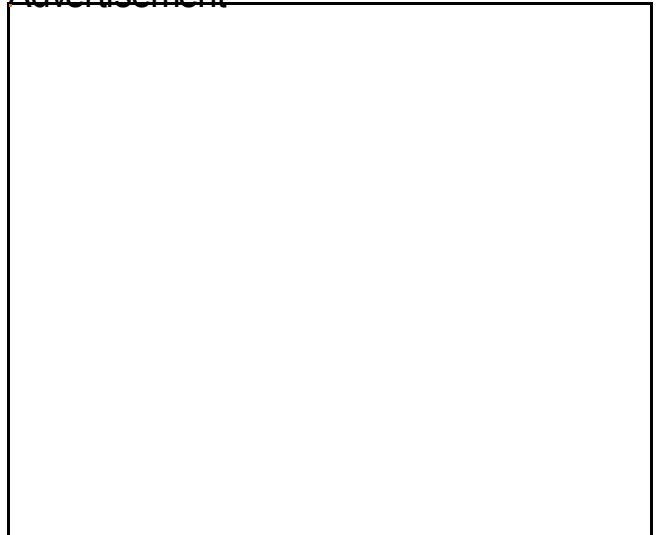
Sister Stella Storch, social justice coordinator for the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Agnes, said people need to develop better listening skills.

"It's about learning how to listen to another person and understand what they were saying, instead of listening in order to give a response. If we listen long enough we will come to understand that we all share the same values," she said. "I don't think there is a person in the state of Wisconsin that wants us to be divided."

## Intolerance

Ascension Lutheran Church Pastor Jeff

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Blain said in a culture that claims tolerance, no one seems to be tolerating anyone. He is reminded of Martin Luther's comments on the Christian commandment to not bear false witness against a neighbor.

"He said that when we are talking about other people we should 'defend them, speak well of them, and explain their actions in the kindest way.' It's so easy for us to descend into innuendo, but we have to be able to speak fairly about the people we disagree with," Blain said.

Civility is not only needed after the "winners" and "losers" have been tallied, but has been sadly lacking in recent political discourse and decision making among citizens and leaders, said Pastor Brian Hastings of Memorial Baptist Church.

"As a Christian, I am saddened to see how often and how easily politics becomes equated with the Gospel — the belief that one party or another has a monopoly on representing the Christian perspective," he said. "It does great harm to our credibility and our community."

Hastings, along with the other local clergy, points to working for the common good.

"When disrespect, disinformation, distrust and disregard for the interests and ideas of others are rampant in our behavior toward those we disagree with, it is correspondingly difficult to achieve this, or even to see and recognize another person's basic humanity and dignity," he said. "The starting point is respecting the other as a human being, not as a label or caricature."

The initial list of 35 signatories to the Call for a Season of Civility is expected to grow over the next several weeks as more religious leaders are invited to support it.

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**'Season of Civility'  
project**

The Season of Civility statement marks the launch of a year-long "Season of Civility" project by the Wisconsin Council of Churches, the Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee and other local partners to provide resources and training opportunities for clergy and other congregational leaders from many denominations and faiths to practice respectful conversations among people of differing political persuasions. The Council of Churches is also encouraging pastors to preach on the topic of civility during the fall election cycle. Sermons

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## Phil Haslanger: Season of Civility aims for consensus

3 HOURS AGO • [PHIL HASLANGER | LOCAL COLUMNIST](#)

In some ways, it must seem like a terrible mismatch.

In the weeks leading up to the recall elections in Wisconsin, two very different faith-based organizations entered the public square.

The Faith and Freedom Coalition — the political organization of the religious right led by Ralph Reed — blitzed the state in the week leading up to the elections, aiming for 600,000 voter contacts with evangelical Christians, Catholics and tea party supporters, according to a press release from the group.

“We have fired up grass-roots activists who will be turning out hundreds of thousands of conservative voters to the polls to vote early and make their voice heard,” the release said, quoting Tony Nasvik, from Hudson, chairman of Wisconsin Faith and Freedom Coalition.

There was nothing subtle about their pitch. Reed put it this way: “We support Gov. Walker’s common-sense reforms to deal with the budget deficit he inherited, and our campaign guarantees we will have a large faith-based and conservative vote on June 5.”

So here you have one of the most powerful, well-funded campaign vehicles of Christian conservatives doing its part to protect the Republicans who control the government in Wisconsin.

Those of us who have a different understanding of what the Gospel says about the imperatives of caring for the poor and vulnerable in society were pretty much run over in political terms by the Faith and Freedom Coalition.

But there was another voice that entered the public square in the last few weeks as well. A coalition of religious leaders — Christians, Jews, Muslims, Bahai, Hindus, Unitarians, Buddhists — called for a “Season of Civility” as Wisconsin deals with the deep political divisions in our state.

“As a result of the extreme political polarization in Wisconsin, many in our congregations and communities feel marginalized or demonized by their neighbors on account of their economic status, occupation or political beliefs,” the coalition said in a statement.

“Politics in a democracy is not a zero-sum game or a winner-take-all contest. Rather, it is a joint effort to reach a workable consensus on how to advance the common good.”

The words are useful, but even more useful is the organizing effort that goes with them. The Wisconsin Council of Churches — an organization representing primarily the traditional Protestant denominations — is calling on congregations to join together in the months ahead to engage people of differing viewpoints in ways that might be more life-giving than divisive.

There are training sessions, ideas for preaching, plans for congregational study groups, all designed to ease the polarization and find enough common ground to address the issues facing Wisconsin, whether they be poverty or education or environment or the role of government.

The Season of Civility does not shy away from the basic call in faith traditions “to be concerned about the common good and the well-being of our neighbors.” But it acknowledges that people of good will may well disagree on the best methods to achieve those goals.

This is not the traditional political activism of Ralph Reed and his crowd, who specialize in using religion as a tool for shoring up one candidate or another.

It’s a respectful approach that draws on the best of faith traditions to seek a better world and to do it in a way that can nurture relationships rather than tear people apart.

*Phil Haslanger is pastor of Memorial United Church of Christ in Fitchburg.*



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## About the columnist



Phil Haslanger

Phil Haslanger is pastor of Memorial United Church of Christ in Fitchburg. He spent about 35 years as a journalist at The Capital Times before moving on to a career in ministry.



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**Parker J. Palmer, Contributor**

Author, speaker, founder and Senior Partner, Center for Courage & Renewal

# A Season of Civility: Religion and Public Life

07/03/2012 11:17 am ET | **Updated** Sep 02, 2012

Want to undermine American democracy?

Start by making citizens so distrustful and dismissive of each other — especially of those who are “different” in their political/religious/philosophical convictions or their sexual orientation/ethnicity/race — that the power of “We the People” dissipates as we tear each other apart instead of confronting democracy’s true enemies.

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How do you do that? Not to worry. It’s already being done by the fear mongers and dividers-and-conquerers who have made the public arena so abusive that many citizens have fled from it.



money are ready, willing and eager to fill. As Bill Moyers has said, "There's only one way to counter the power of organized money, and that's with the power of organized people."

Political civility is not about being polite to each other. It's about reclaiming the power of "We the People" to come together, debate the common good and call American democracy back to its highest values amid our differences. The civility we need will come not from watching our tongues, *but from valuing our differences and the creativity that can come when we hold them well.*

America was founded on the historically novel and radical premise that *conflict and tension, rightly held, are the engine, not the enemy, of a better social order.* By holding our differences with hospitality instead of hostility, we can act on that premise, rebuild our civic community and hold power accountable to the will of the people.

### **From Theory to Practice: A Model Project**

In service of these goals, the Wisconsin Council of Churches — with the backing of Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities — has launched a state-wide project called **"A Season of Civility"** amid what they call "the partisan rancor of the recent recall campaigns and the anticipated divisiveness of the fall election cycle."

They ask,

*"Are you weary of the increasing polarization in our public discourse at the very time we need government leadership to address our biggest problems? You can help begin a different kind of conversation in our congregations and communities. We should neither remain silent nor go along with the prevailing bitterness in our politics. We must create 'safe spaces' for respectful conversations across the partisan divides. And we must move beyond the walls of our congregations to include everyone in our local communities in this dialogue."*

Please note that "everyone in our local communities" includes secular humanists and others who subscribe to no religious tradition. There's no conceit here that religious believers are better at civility than others. Instead, there's a commitment to the notion that we all have a lot to learn from people who see things differently from us.

As the text for this project, the Council is using my new book, "

#### **Healing the Heart of Democracy**

," with special focus on the five "habits of the heart" I explore in it:

- An understanding that we are all in this together
- An appreciation of the value of "otherness"



- A sense of personal voice and agency
- A capacity to create community

Representatives from the five religious communities involved with this project have translated these habits into the language of their own traditions and cite supportive texts. These translations (available as

[downloadable PDFs](#)

on the Council’s website) can serve as wonderful discussion starters in settings of many sorts.

Do you have a Council of Churches and/or an Interfaith Council in your city or state? If so, please let them know about this model project. It reaches wide and deep, and seems to me to hold great promise.



**BEFORE YOU GO**



01:37

Leaders From Area Religious Communities Join Together To Stop Hate

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# A SEASON OF CIVILITY IN RESPONSE TO CAMPAIGN INCIVILITY

BY [BRIAN E. KONKOL](#)



SEP 7, 2012

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*"In a democracy, the people get the government they deserve." – Alexis de Tocqueville*

With the Democratic and Republican national conventions behind us, and an increase of political campaigning in front of us, we recognize the timeliness of the above quotation from Alexis de Tocqueville. In a democracy the citizens choose their government, thus we indeed receive the government we deserve. As Lisa Sharon Harper recently stated:

*"In its purest form, politics is simply how we organize our life together in society...in a Democratic Republic like our own, the [people are] ultimately responsible for the policies, laws, and structures that guide daily life. As we vote for candidates and ballot measures, we shape our society."*

With such thoughts in mind, we affirm the collective ability to "shape our society," but we do so not only through the ability to choose our candidates and pass ballot measures, but we also possess the capacity to shape *the process* of how our leaders and policies are selected. In other words, while many complain about the high quantity and low quality of political campaigns, we are confronted with a harsh reality: In a democracy, we get the political campaigns we deserve.

While an assortment of citizens confess their frustrations surrounding the time, effort, and financial resources that are poured into negative campaigns, we recognize a simple political truth: partisan leaders behave in such ways *because we allow it to work*.

According to Mark Penn, a former Democratic Party strategist, he and his colleagues once designed research for President Bill Clinton's re-election bid in 1996, in which voters were shown negative campaign ads in public places. After voters were shown the negative ads, they were interviewed in private (where the participants could speak more openly), and most admitted that negative campaigning had a direct impact.

Similar studies show that while many citizens state publicly that they detest all negative campaigning, privately many are indeed moved by them. Thus the political parties seize upon this opportunity, and the result is a continuous offensive of negative campaigns from all sides of the political spectrum.

While there is far more that can be stated surrounding the consequences and effectiveness of negative campaigns, (and many others have done so), it is worth reflecting upon the type of society we wish to shape. In other words, citizens of a democracy such as ours are not powerless in the face of mass negativity and contempt, but we possess the collective authority to reshape our society in the ways we see most fit.

So the time has come to not only advocate for particular policies and public leaders, but we should demand a more civil process of campaigning that leads to such policies and leaders. In other words, the journey of a campaign shapes us in ways similar to its results, thus we deserve better than the current state of incivility, and the time has come to demand more.

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Among other things, one of the ways that citizens can shape a more civil society is to embody respect and value the dignity of all people. Along these lines, one can highlight the Wisconsin Council of Churches and Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee, for they are leading a “Season of Civility” in response to the divisive and disrespectful nature of politics in Wisconsin and throughout North America.

The following is an excerpt from their statement on civility, a document that was signed by numerous spiritual leaders – from an assortment of religious traditions- located throughout Wisconsin:

*... we commit ourselves to a Season of Civility:*

- *We will seek to model and support respectful and honest conversations on public issues within our congregations, assemblies, and other forums.*
- *We will make a genuine effort to understand the reasons for the views of those with whom we disagree and try to explain the grounds for our own positions clearly and without arrogance. Our goal will be to identify shared values and concerns, rather than to “win” arguments.*
- *We will be mindful of our own fallibility and keep our views open to correction and reconsideration without betraying our deepest convictions.*

*We encourage all of our fellow citizens, to likewise commit themselves to a Season of Civility:*

- *Our congregations should be places where civility is taught and practiced as together we seek to learn what our faith calls us to do and be in the world.*
- *Candidates should strive to adhere to high standards of civility, integrity and truthfulness and insist that the advertisements produced by their own campaigns, and those of third parties, do the same.*
- *In their campaign reporting and commentary, media should subject all claims and counterclaims to rigorous but fair scrutiny, checking facts, critiquing logic, evaluating sources, and providing context.*
- *As citizens we should all be critical consumers of media and advertising, questioning claims and resisting attempts to manipulate our emotions.*

In light of such thoughts, we should support a season of civility during this era of increasingly uncivil political campaigns. While it is indeed necessary to constructively critique the candidates and their political affiliations, we should also expect more from ourselves.

When we demean politicians – and when we show disrespect toward those who hold different views – we often feed a massive cycle of communal negativity and disregard, and as a result we see minimal progress and maximum division. And so, instead of trying to fight fire with more fire, the time has come to practice civility among ourselves as we engage in public life, and as we do so, learn to demand respectfulness from our elected officials, before and after Election Day.

In addition to the temptation of feeding the cycle of public and political incivility, we also recognize the appeal of withdrawing from participation all together. There are many who believe the best option is to retreat, not answer the telephone, avoid campaigns (if it were possible), and/or hide from friends and family members who wish to speak about the choice of candidates.

But such attempts of seclusion are not helpful as we try to reshape our society, for brushing the dirt away from view does not make the house clean. In contrast to attempts at escape, and in response to incivility, the time has come to engage with the political process, observe it, examine it, correct it, and participate in the long-term journey of transforming our political culture and infusing our public institutions with dignity and respect in a communal search for a common good.

When we wish to see more respect from others, we start by practicing respectfulness among ourselves. And so, in the midst of so much incivility during this election season, let us promote and practice a season of civility. We can reshape our society, and by God’s grace, it can start today.

**Brian E. Konkol** is an ordained pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), serves as Co-Pastor of Lake Edge Lutheran Church (Madison, Wis.), and is a PhD candidate in Theology & Development with the University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa).



**Brian E. Konkol**

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