



**Spirit in Action**

# **Facilitating Circles of Change**

**Curriculum Guide**

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Louisville, Kentucky  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Western Massachusetts  
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*supported by the vision and commitment of Spirit in Action*

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*Back row, left to right: Richard Ford, Cathy Hoffman, Bethsaida Ruiz, Betty Burkes, Linda Stout, Phyllis Labanowski.  
Front row: Megan Voorhees and Carolyn Cushing.*

**W**e came together from the East and West Coasts, for a year and a half. We worked collectively—sometimes in person at weekend retreats and other times by email and telephone—creating, writing, editing, reading, eating, and engaging. We were guided by spirit, our activism, our experience with Circles of Change, and all those who come before us and all those working alongside us for a beloved community and a just world.

We are parents and godparents, aunts and uncles, daughters and sons, sisters and brothers. We are married, partnered, and single; lesbian, bisexual, and straight. We were raised poor, working class, middle class, and wealthy as African American, Boriqua, Native American, WASP, and by descendents of German, Polish, Dutch, and Irish peoples. We are Quaker, Buddhist, Christian, Wiccan, and deeply spiritual.

We are creators, artists, singers, musicians, poets, writers, and visionaries. We are activists, organizers, educators, social workers, and environmentalists. Collectively, we have contributed more than 230 years of activism to the work of affordable housing, women's liberation, LGBTQ civil rights, racial equality, restorative justice, peace, youth advocacy, AIDS, health care for all, literacy, education reform, economic justice, immigrant rights, global justice, Puerto Rican Independence, and the environment—locally, nationally, and internationally. We have worked in solidarity with the peoples of Puerto Rico, Cuba, Chiapas, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Brazil, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Palestine, and Iraq.

Facilitating Circles of Change Curriculum Guide answers a call for reinvigorated leadership and connection, providing reflections and exercises for people seeking transformational social change through self-awareness and cooperation. It is our best thinking about how to support communities of people to think creatively, to clarify our priorities and our commitments, to inspire each other to live our dreams, and to feel the power of what is possible when we act collectively with others who share our commitment. It is a work in progress. Each day we are inspired anew.

This curriculum guide is the collective wisdom of nearly 200 people from diverse backgrounds who participated in Spirit in Action's Circles of Change Program between 2001 and 2004. A committee of six facilitators of Circles and two Spirit in Action staff drew from this well of wisdom to write this curriculum. Committee members brought their unique gifts and experiences to the process. As a group we were guided by a set of shared beliefs.

**We believe in heart- and spirit-centered work:** making connections to wholeness, acting with compassion, and connecting with one's life purpose, hopes, and greatest potential.

**We believe in the power of our relationships:** taking time to develop relationships based in truth and in authenticity, healing our divisions and learning to find connections with one another across differences and uncommon alliances.

**We believe in nonviolence:** inviting us to hold the "other" as part of ourselves with respect and compassion.

**We believe that in a true democracy, we are all equal even though we are not the same:** honoring different perspectives, life experiences, and the inherent goodness of each person.

**We believe that each of us has power and resources:** nurturing power with each other allows us to meaningfully effect institutional change, together.

**We believe in collective leadership:** providing opportunities for everyone to contribute their gifts and to share in leadership responsibilities and accountability.

**We believe in creating a shared and positive vision:** working collectively for the change we want to see, inspiring others to join us.

**We believe that we can create a successful movement for social change:** remembering daily that who we are with each other is the foundation for the world we create.

We also recognize that we are living in a critical time. War making, militarism, violence, and injustice abound towards humanity and the earth. The government policies of the United States endorse the unprecedented use of preemptive war to attack others and use pretexts of outside threats to exercise force designed for world domination. The corporate-controlled media provides justification to the powers-that-be, ignoring the stories of hope and change. Violence is glorified as heroic and promoted as a solution to violence eclipsing the power of community, cooperation, and love. And, inattention to global warming and environmental pollution has led to a devastation of our land and waters for generations to come.

Yet, every day individuals and groups of people are living an alternative based on mutuality and respect. Every day men, women, and children express compassion, cherish family, write music, fall in love, and notice the beauty and brilliance present in themselves and others. Every day people are organizing for peace and justice, growing food, cleaning parks, marching in demonstrations, challenging toxic waste dumping, advocating for better schools and access to health care, making documentaries, and creating hope through public art. Every day we hold a vision and insist on democracy.

Spirit in Action draws its inspiration from those who have come before us and those who work alongside us—in our own communities and around the globe. Circles of Change bring us together, people seeking peace and justice, to explore and practice activism that sustains and nurtures our hearts and souls. We have created the Facilitating Circles of Change Curriculum Guide to support our work in these critical times. It is our gift to you, the facilitator, the activist, the organizer, the mother, the father, the neighbor ...



# *Spirit in Action and Circles of Change*

*“I know in my heart, if we are to make deep and  
lasting change, we have to do things differently.”*

—Linda Stout, Spirit in Action  
founder and director

**S**pirit in Action supports, sustains, and connects those who are passionate about justice, love, equality, creativity, and sustainability to work collectively for deep and lasting social change and for the protection of the planet. Through our programs, Circles of Change and the Progressive Communicators Network, we provide tools, training, and networking opportunities for: weaving a heart and spirit perspective into change work; creating positive vision; healing divisions of social identity, competition, and issue-focus; and taking action that integrates individual, group, and systems change.

Spirit in Action was founded in 1999 by Linda Stout, a long-term grassroots organizer and author of *Bridging the Class Divide*. Inspired by movement building in the U.S. and guided by her own decades of experience in the grassroots movement for social justice, she identified four critical needs for the progressive movement stepping into the twenty-first century:

**A clear and positive message to convey the movement's values and work to a broader audience.** Social change advocates often talk about what we are *against* rather than what we are *for*. Fear of an “enemy” is often used to try to mobilize action in social justice organizations. Fear and opposition have not proven to be effective tools for sustaining a movement over time and increasing its membership.

**A connection to heart, community, culture, and spirit.** In her work with participants in the Peace Development Fund's *Listening Project* (a nationwide study of social activists)<sup>1</sup> Stout heard that the progressive movement needed to embrace “a cultural and spiritual component [that] nurtures and strengthens those in the struggle.” Activists often talk about staying with their work because they are deeply committed to justice and because their work is directly tied to their spirituality. While activists may share these beliefs, the day-to-day demands of their work often drown out these quieter inspirations. The result is that many activists are denied a tool critical to sustaining them through the challenges of their work.

**New ways of working that repair fragmentation and create connections.** Although grassroots activists share similar visions and values, there are a number of issues that fragment the movement and inhibit effective work. Many groups are devoted to working on single issues and activists do not feel they have the time or resources to make connections across issues, or geography. In addition, the existence of oppression (racism, classism, and homophobia, for example) in society and in the social justice movement creates divisions, weakens organizations, and deprives the movement of the talent of people. And, many activists express how troubling it is that turf issues and competition for funding create divisions in the progressive community.

**Time and support for doing visionary and “big picture” thinking.** Activists need the time to reflect on long-term issues and to develop visions for the futures of their organizations and the movement. In addition, there need to be people and organizations that are thinking about and envisioning the larger movement.

**Circles of Change** began as an experiment to create ways to meet these needs. Initially, Spirit in Action invited a small group of political and spiritual activists from across the U.S. to become facilitators of Circles in their own communities. In a series of training sessions, they shared ideas, built community with one another, and created a pilot curriculum for Circles of Change. After running six-week pilot Circles, facilitators regathered to reflect on what they had learned about the work of Circles and movement building. They laid the foundation for a 13-session Circles of Change program lead by an expanded pool of 27 facilitators.

These 27 Circle facilitators and leaders modeled the vision of broad diversity for Circle membership: they ranged in age from their 20s to their 60s, they were ethnically and racially diverse, and they

<sup>1</sup> *The Listening Project: A National Dialogue on Progressive Movement Building* (Peace Development Fund, 1999). This report can be found on the Web at <http://peacefund.org/done/done.html>.

described their spirit perspectives in many different ways. They worked on a wide range of issues in their activist lives, including: women and girls' empowerment; Colombian solidarity; prison reform; environmental activism; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender civil rights; educational reform and student empowerment; cross-border organizing; college campus organizing; cultural activism; antiracism work; and anti-corporate globalization activism.

To date, 15 official Circles of Change have run in five states: California, Massachusetts, Washington, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania. A number of Circles have continued past their official sessions, and other kinds of circles have formed inspired by Circles of Change.

The collective wisdom gathered from these Circles forms the foundation for this curriculum guide. The four main sections of the Circles of Change curriculum guide embody our understanding of the core strategies for building a broad-based movement that achieves transformational social change. These core strategies continue to evolve from the insights and understandings of those who are using them. The four core strategies are:

### **1. Connecting with Spirit**

Acknowledging spirit is a conscious recognition of our wholeness, interdependence, and interconnection to all life on earth. Integrating this understanding of spirit into social justice work brings forward what inspires and sustains us.

### **2. Healing from Divisions: Building a Diverse Movement**

Being in diverse community is essential to making broad-based change in the U.S. To enjoy the privilege and responsibility of being in diverse community, people are called to recognize that we share both a common humanity and particular social identities, which accord power in unbalanced ways. Bridging this power divide is at the heart of healing divisions.

### **3. Collective Visioning for a Positive Future**

Vision is a foundation for action. The work of visioning has an intrinsic connection to action for change—a continuum that includes personal change work, relationship and community building, and direct political action to enact systemic change. Collective visioning supports the work on all these levels. As we work to change ourselves, create our concrete images of a positive future, and vision collectively, we are taking steps toward change enacted on a societal scale.

### **4. Action for Deep and Lasting Change**

Action for deep and lasting change exists along a continuum that includes mass demonstrations as well as supporting the psychological, physical, and spiritual health of activists. Circles serve as a space for doing the less dramatic forms of activism, such as self-care, trust and relationship building, and the examination of strategy and development of new change tools.



## Creating Circles of Change

**Circles of Change are for anyone who is working for peace and seeking justice.**

Circles are most useful to people who share some basic commitment to the values of peace making and justice. Circles provide a space for reflection and a time to reenergize, particularly for “activists” (people already strongly involved in social justice work). They provide a space for dialogue between people grounded in spiritual traditions and those guided by a secular view of change. They provide a space for the exchange between newer social change workers and veterans. We have found that Circles are less useful for people who have not worked for social change.

**A diversity of age, racial and ethnic identity, gender and sexuality, and class backgrounds strengthens a Circle.**

The separations and rankings built into our society foster distortion and disconnection. In order to build a movement or even be a whole person, it is necessary to see into these divisions and relearn who we are. Without diversity in the Circle, participants can only guess at the experiences of others informed by external information. A breadth of identities present enables each person to share themselves, take into account multiple perspectives about creating change, and be more fully accountable. A diverse Circle enables us to embody the world which exists and the diverse movement we hope to build.

**A diversity of interest in issues strengthens a Circle.**

In the past activists have tended to work on single issues. At times we have re-created divisions. As we move into the twenty-first century it is clear that we must create coalitions. Circles bring together people across issues and allow us to think about our communities collectively.

**Circles work well with eight to twelve participants.**

Having eight to twelve participants allows a Circle to achieve real diversity, have enough different experiences to enliven the discussion, and share in the “work” of the Circle. Fewer than eight makes it difficult to run the Circle and more than 12 makes it hard to have everyone’s voice really heard.

**Commitment builds meaningful relationships.**

Circle participants commit to 13 sessions, allowing the time to build meaningful relationships, which is at the heart of our work. Continuity enables a group to cover the areas that are important and really engage with the conflicts which tend to arise. Although our lives are full, and scheduling 13 sessions can be challenging, we encourage facilitators to figure out how to best meet the scheduling needs of their Circle.

**People benefit from their participation in a Circle.**

Circles build communities. Circles support each individual’s unique leadership and provide the inspiration that comes from being connected to a national network of people. Circles encourage participants to explore how to invite spirit into groups that are culturally diverse and committed to social and political change. They encourage participants to explore how to find a positive and long-term perspective in vision work. They support participants to build community across difference and provide time to explore conflict. And, participants explore how to include self-care, relationship building, and dialogue into their action.

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## The Power of Circles

by Arrington Chambliss, Boston Circle facilitator

*I walked into the meeting at 6:00 p.m. There were eight of us gathered from different organizations and congregations. There was a sense of urgency. We had an hour and a half to create a plan for mobilizing 100 people for the peace rally in two weeks. We began with a review of the agenda and launched into the meeting creating lists, call sheets, and timelines. We were productive. We ended on time and each person chatted for a bit and then left to go to the next meeting, out with friends, or home to family. I left and stepped onto the subway noticing how tired I was. The newspaper's front-page article read, "Increase in Spending for the War." I wondered if we were making a difference.*

*How many times had I been in an organizing meeting for a direct action or campaign and left feeling productive but empty; with people but not connected; tired more than inspired. Through Circles of Change, I have come to know another way. Building community is at the heart of these Circles—communities that reveal the best of who we are, that allow us to practice new ways of being with one another. At its best, the experience of community reminds us of everything we really know and connects us to:*

**Our wholeness as humans**—Each Circle begins with some form of practice or ritual, led by a member from the group who invites each of us to bring all of ourselves to the gathering. This opening welcomes participants to bring all aspects of themselves as humans—intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and physically—honoring the whole human journey and making room for us to celebrate, rest, cry, holler, laugh, move, dance, think, sing, hope, despair, fall down, and stand up.

**Our wholeness through connection to others**—Lured by the illusion of individualism, we forget that we are part of a web of living systems, an ecosystem of interconnected relationships. The way to understand and realize our individual and collective potential is through each other. Through the Circle participants are invited to notice areas of their lives where they need support and where they can give support. Some people have had breakthroughs about community organizing strategies and others have been sustained through a phase of despair about the world. Being part of a community gives us a way to see the whole. It teaches us how to practice interdependency, strengthening our collective potential for social change.

**Our wholeness as a movement**—We are living in the movements of today—movements that will become our history. During a Boston Circle, we created a timeline of each of our connections to movements, both historically and currently. We told stories about our involvement. We filled in the histories and herstories rarely told in books. We learned from each other. We connected to a sense of possibility for change.

*Circles of Change create leaders capable of transforming the culture of social change work so that the following scenario becomes the norm:*

*I walked into a meeting at 6:00 p.m. Three people greeted me in a room with chairs arranged in a circle. There were flowers on a table in the center and pictures of successful campaigns for civil rights victories with pink triangle pins dispersed among the pictures. We began the meeting listening to an inspiring song that someone in the group wanted to share. For the first 30 minutes we ate a light dinner and settled into check-ins with each other about our lives. The meeting began with the victories of the past week. The facilitator shared the strategy to win the state legislature's vote on gay marriage. We each listened intently and offered feedback about how we might contribute to the success. We ended the meeting with a checkout about action steps and requests for support. Someone suggested that we close by singing the song that we sang in the atrium of the State House on the evening of the last vote. I left the meeting clear about my commitment and feeling connected to real movement. Even if we lose the vote, and I doubt we will, I am sure that what we are building is revolutionary.*

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# *Beginning Your Circle of Change*

*“Creating safe and trusting communities with diverse groups of people takes time, but pays off. Broad-based movements would be well served to have smaller circles doing the trust and healing work that will ripple out into the larger movement.”*

—a San Francisco facilitator

**T**he work that you do before the Circle impacts the experience of your Circle. Becoming familiar with this curriculum and reflecting on your own facilitation skills is your work. We suggest preparing in the following ways.

**Spend time with your cofacilitator.**

We can't emphasize enough the importance of spending time and learning about each other. Spend time working through the entire curriculum with one another, exploring how you want to lead the Circle and exercises together.

**Spend the time it takes to recruit a diverse Circle.**

You probably know best how to work in your own community. We have included some of the recruitment strategies Circle facilitators have used. See *Recruiting a Diverse Circle*, page 103. You can always contact Spirit in Action for ideas. Do not rush recruitment, unless you already have an existing group with which you are going to work. It is critical that you find the right people who are hungry for this approach.

**Find the right space to meet in.**

Find a space in which your entire group can sit in a circle and be comfortable. You will need a space where you can eat together, so a space with a kitchen is preferable. We recommend that you find a space where you can meet for all 13 sessions.

**Break bread together.**

*"Never underestimate the power of a good meal shared together as part of the process."*

—a San Francisco facilitator

An important component of each Circle gathering is a shared meal. This becomes a ritual, central to building community. You will need to decide how you are going to make this happen: are you going to cook for the group each time, are you going to ask each participant to cook for one session, or will a potluck work best? The meals you share do not have to be gourmet, but a home-cooked meal is a gift to people, as many Circles have attested! Be aware that the group's choices for food at each meal is a way to welcome and to explore the Circle's diversity. As a community consider each others' cultures, diets, needs, and comfort levels. As a community figure out how to break bread together—for example, meat is an integral part of the diet of some Circle participants, yet vegans may not allow meat in their homes.

**Identify the resources you'll need and encourage participants to contribute.**

It is important to figure out how to access the resources your Circle will need. Once your Circle begins meeting, participants should be invited to contribute the resources they have access to, whether it is their time, money, or the actual supplies, meals, etc.



The curriculum begins by creating community in the Circle and ends by planning for action in the larger community. The sessions in between explore the four core strategies that Spirit in Action has identified as essential for building a broad-based movement into the twenty-first century: Connecting with Spirit, Healing from Divisions: Building a Diverse Movement, Collective Visioning for a Positive Future, and Action for Deep and Lasting Change.

The curriculum guide is a menu of options. You should select what is most useful to your participants in the course of the 13 sessions. Choose exercises that feed the souls of the participants and the group. We have listed exercises as Core and as Supplemental. The core exercises are ones which we have found to be central to achieving the goals of the Circles of Change. Not all Circles will need to complete every core exercise. If Circle participants are knowledgeable about and experienced with the concepts explored in a particular exercise, it can be skipped so time can be spent on those aspects of the curriculum which are most needed by the participants in your Circle. The alternative exercises will be useful too depending on the group's needs, interests, and dynamics. They further develop the ideas presented in the core exercises.

We invite you to create a balance in the choices you make so that everyone is engaged, no matter what their learning style is. (See *A Quick Guide to Howard Gardener's Multiple Intelligences*, page 87.) Draw out the wisdom present in the Circle participants. Build in reflection in every session. And remember that less is more; don't try to do too much in any given session.

A typical Circle session will include the following:

- *Circle Openings* (see page 88)
- *Check-ins* (see page 91)
- Shared meal
- Exercise
- Reflection Questions (included at the end of each exercise)
- *Circle Closings* (see page 101)

Facilitating a Circle of Change is a lot of work. We have included a section at the end of the curriculum, *Sharing Our Wisdom—Supporting Your Facilitation*, to add a depth and breadth of understanding that we hope you will find useful. In addition, we have compiled a list of resources that support and inspire us in our own work as facilitators and activists, *Resources for Supporting Circles of Change*, page 107.

# A Suggested Plan for the 13 Sessions

Strategy for Building a Broad-based Movement	Session	Core Exercises	Supplemental Exercises
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sharing Our Stories: <i>Connecting Spirit and Action</i> page 13</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Inspirational Quotes page 94</li> </ul>
Connecting with Spirit	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Invitations to Spirit page 14</li> <li>■ Spirit in Action Journey Mapping page 16</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Our Stories of Hope page 93</li> <li>■ Applying Circle Learnings page 62</li> </ul>
Healing from Divisions: Building a Diverse Movement	3–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sharing Our Stories <i>Drawing on the Strength of Diversity</i> page 24</li> <li>■ Choose one of the following:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Stepping into the Circle page 25</li> <li>—Uprooting the Consciousness of Oppression page 28</li> <li>—Theatre of the Oppressed page 32</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Understanding Movements page 34</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Our Stories of Hope page 93</li> <li>■ Inspirational Quotes page 94</li> <li>■ I Am From ... page 39</li> <li>■ Facing the Challenges page 68</li> <li>■ Applying Circle Learnings page 62</li> </ul>
Collective Visioning for a Positive Future	7–8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sharing Our Stories: <i>Hope</i> page 43</li> <li>■ Imagining a World in 2030 page 44</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Our Stories of Hope page 93</li> <li>■ The Body of Achievement page 49</li> <li>■ Inspirational Quotes page 94</li> <li>■ Speaking Our Heart's Truth page 53</li> <li>■ Visioning the Future in One Session page 56</li> <li>■ Applying Circle Learnings page 62</li> </ul>
Action for Deep and Lasting Change	9–11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sharing Our Stories: <i>Answering the Call—Agents of Change</i> page 61</li> <li>■ Applying Circle Learnings page 62</li> <li>■ Spectrum of Allies page 65</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Our Stories of Hope page 93</li> <li>■ Inspirational Quotes page 94</li> <li>■ What Do You Want? Creating Change through Our Connections page 67</li> </ul>
	12–13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Reviewing the Circle: Identifying Its Strengths and Positive Core page 69</li> <li>■ Final Closing page 73</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Facing the Challenges page 93</li> </ul>

Beginning Your Circle of Change

**T**he first gathering of your Circle is especially important as it sets the tone for the Circle's future. Here are some things to consider.

**Meet in a space that allows you to sit in a circle—a circle affirms that we are equal.**

The physical circle is central to the Circle experience. Inviting people to arrange themselves in circles is a structural affirmation of a universal human need to feel related, included, and individually valued.

**Be thoughtful about the rituals you bring to the Circle.**

Circle participants, like any new group, are cautious at the first session. Some will arrive with little experience when it comes to ritual, while others will be thrilled. Being thoughtful about the rituals you select and how you lead them is critical in the first gathering. Inspired by their Circle gatherings, facilitators and participants have cocreated a variety of rituals which have worked. See *Invitations to Spirit*, page 14, and *Circle Openings*, page 88.

**Allow time for Circle participants to get to know one another.**

Time is a gift to those who gather in Circles. Participants will want to know who they are with and what they might give to and receive from each other. *Sharing Our Stories*, page 13, is designed to begin conversations in the first session. (The sharing of stories is a good way to begin each section as well.) We also suggest handing out a contact list so that people can see each other's names and know how to contact each other. (You'll need to get permission to do this during recruitment.)

**Clarify the expectations of the Circle and your role as cofacilitators.**

There are lots of details to cover in the first session. Undoubtedly, participants will have questions for the other members of the group and for the facilitators. Include in your discussions:

- A short introduction to Spirit in Action and a short introduction to the Circles of Change program, its history and goals. See *Spirit in Action and Circles of Change*, page 1.

## Ritual

Built into many of the exercises, as well as in the *Openings* and *Closings*, rituals are the ways that we intentionally connect or reconnect to our selves, to each other, and to that which inspires us. If it doesn't work to use the word *ritual* in your Circle don't use it, but do draw on the power of the idea of *ritual*.

- Share why you have chosen to facilitate the Circle. Make sure participants know that you will be the cofacilitators throughout the life of the Circle. (In the past, some Circles invited participants to share facilitation. It did not work.)
- Discuss and clarify questions about the scheduling and commitments for participation.

### Create agreements that promote authentic participation.

It is important for Circles to create agreements together that encourage genuine engagement while simultaneously acknowledging that disagreement and confusion are part of becoming community. This is the collective work of Circle participants. And it is the joy and challenge of being in diverse groups. As a committee, we spent a lot of time thinking through the shift Circles require in our relationships to each other. We wrote several essays to explore the complexity of this shift. See *Reflections on “Power With,”* page 20 and *The Impact of “Power Over,”* page 21.

### Agreements<sup>1</sup> Presented to the Boston Circle by the Facilitators

Show up and choose to be present.

Pay attention to what has heart and meaning.

Tell the truth without blame or judgment.

Be open, not attached, to outcome.

<sup>1</sup> Angeles Arrien, *The Four Fold Way: Walking the Paths of the Warrior, Teacher, Healer, and Visionary* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

To begin this conversation about agreements, ask participants to reflect on the following questions.

What do you need from me so that you can step into your power with me?

What do you need from us so that you can step into your power with the entire group?

(We recommend periodically revisiting your Circle’s agreements as a way to check-in with the collective.)

### Build in time to reflect and close the first gathering.

Be sure to leave time for participants to share their excitements and fears. Select a closing that will allow for some reflection to end. See *Circle Closings*, page 101.

You may also want to check in with each participant by phone or email during the week between your first and second sessions, to see if they have any questions, concerns, etc.

### This is what we recommend for the first session:

- *Circle Openings* (see page 88) *Creating A Table of Inspiration* is a good opening for the first session.
- *Check-ins* (see page 91)
- Shared meal
- *Sharing Our Stories: Connecting Spirit and Action* (see page 13) The directions for the exercise *Sharing Our Stories* are on page 10.
- Clarify expectations
- Create agreements
- *Circle Closings* (see page 101) *Receiving and Giving Light* is a good closing for the first session.

Beginning  
Your Circle  
of Change

*“Everything that has ever helped me has come through what already lay stored in me. Old things, diffuse, unnamed lie strong across my heart. This is where my strength comes from.”*

—Adrienne Rich (1929–present, poet, essayist, and feminist author)

## Sharing Our Stories

### RATIONALE

We all have stories to tell. Sharing our stories with each other helps us to build powerful communities; we are reminded that we are collectively wise. We recommend beginning an exploration of each of the four core strategies for building a broad-based movement with this exercise. Use questions to draw out the stories of Circle participants.

**TIME NEEDED:** 45 minutes

### OUTCOME

Through the sharing of personal stories, participants will seek out the best of what is to help ignite the group’s collective imagination of what might be.

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. Begin an exploration of a core strategy by asking participants to share their stories. Explore “Connecting with Spirit” in Session 1, using *Connecting Spirit and Action* on page 13.

(To begin exploring “Healing from Divisions: Building a Diverse Movement” use *Drawing on the Strength of Diversity*, page 24. To begin exploring “Collective Visioning for a Positive Future” use *Hope*, page 43. To begin exploring “Action for Deep and Lasting Change” use *Answering the Call—Agents of Change*, page 61.)

Each time, provide the following directions.

Use the questions to interview a partner. Each of you will have a turn being both interviewer and interviewee. Your job as an interviewer is to be a “super listener” who gives full attention to your interviewee. Seek to understand how she or he sees the world. You are not responsible for reporting back everything your partner has said, rather you will share the most inspirational stories, ideas, dreams, and themes you heard. Feel free to take notes during your interview to help you remember what you want to share with the rest of the members of our Circle.

2. Allow ten minutes per person to share their stories, 20 minutes in all. Let participants know when half the time is up so that their partner doesn’t miss out on their turn to share.

3. At the end of the paired story sharing, reconvene as a whole Circle. Ask partners to share with the other Circle participants what it is that inspires them about the stories they heard. This is an important part of the exercise since it leads groups to their highest common ground.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Did you hear any themes across our stories?

What wisdom can we draw from our stories?

How can we apply what we have learned to our relationships, our activism, and our lives?

*A Core Strategy for Building a Broad-based Movement*

# *Connecting with Spirit*

## **Building A Diverse Movement**

Acknowledging spirit is a conscious recognition of our wholeness, interdependence, and interconnection to all life on earth. Integrating this understanding of spirit into social justice work brings forward what inspires and sustains us.



**A**cknowledging spirit is a conscious recognition of our wholeness, interdependence, and interconnection to all life on earth. Integrating this understanding of spirit into social justice work brings forward what inspires and sustains us. People tend to think of spirit as their spiritual practice, or as a current or childhood religion, or as a natural or otherworldly entity. Spirit is all these. Although there is no one way to define spirit, it is important for Circle participants to develop an understanding of spirit and how a shared awareness of spirit can positively impact our work together, particularly as it connects to the work of political and social transformation. It is therefore important for facilitators to help their Circle find language to talk about it.

**Spirit is inclusive, and diverse groups benefit when spirit is acknowledged, honored, and shared in its many forms.** Circles of Change welcome the perspectives of participants and that includes our diverse spirit perspectives. Yet, the sharing of participants' spirit perspectives does not come automatically. Participants can be shy about sharing their beliefs and practices. Some still experience discrimination and denigration of their practices. Others carry past feelings and unresolved hurts, often from childhood religious experiences. Some religious beliefs have been deeply divisive. Often aware of, and sensitive to this reality, those who adhere to traditional religions, particularly Christians, may not want to impose their faith on others in the Circle. Facilitators should create an open atmosphere to invite the expression and sharing of all spirit perspectives early in the life of the Circle, using diverse and inclusive language when talking about it. See *Spirit*, page 12. When all spirit perspectives and faith traditions are acknowledged and honored, people can bring this source of inspiration to their Circle.

**Awareness of spirit supports a shift in consciousness, fostering a greater sense of connectedness among group members and assisting people to view concepts often seen as conflicting—such as spirit and action—as parts of a whole rather than opposites.** Connecting to spirit increases people's awareness of their own inspiring conception of spirit. This conception, in all its many forms, calls us to live out our highest values. For many—Circle participants and the general public—these highest values and aspirations are not lived out in the institutions of the wider society. The Circle, like other spaces that intentionally draw attention to spirit, allows people to turn down the volume on the noise of the wider society. When spirit has a central place in the life of a group, the atmosphere “creates connection and dissolves separateness,” in the words of a Bay Area participant.

**An ongoing and deepening connection to spirit allows people to access the inner resources needed to “be the change they wish to see in the world.”** The presence of spirit in Circles gives participants a powerful support, allowing our beliefs and behaviors to shift. We can experience a change in our way of being and working together. Deep connections, which nurture respect and create a foundation for collective action, are central, though often hidden, aspects of the history of change. Campaigns, for example, whether educational, electoral, or direct action, require different strategies and tactics to meet the needs and realities of their moment and history. At the heart of change work, people are required to come together and act collaboratively and work productively. How we treat each other, engage with each other and respect each other is at the heart of our work together, and is a manifestation of spirit.



To engage in spirit-centered work for social change, both in and out of Circles, facilitators can support participants to develop the following attitudes and skills:

- Sharing spirit perspectives and practices. Circles can create a space for full and open sharing, which may facilitate new insights and openings for all participants. For some the sharing of their spirit perspective may stir up past hurts in themselves and in their fellow participants. Both the sharing and the stirring up can become entry points for healing.
- Learning about the spirit perspectives and practices of others. Sometimes we carry misconceptions, bias, and prejudices both conscious and unconscious against some spirit perspectives and faith traditions. If these arise, examine them, search for their source, question their validity, and seek reconciliation.
- Creating with fellow Circle participants exercises, rituals, or practices that draw from the multiple spirit perspectives present.
- Watching for cultural appropriation. Given the complex and sometimes difficult history of interaction between religions and spiritual traditions, when sharing or using the practices of others, do so with great respect. A good guideline is to present and use only the spirit practices of those present in the Circle. That way someone truly grounded in the spirit practices can make sure all is done appropriately. Healing the wounds of history calls us to honor the right of people to have ownership of, and authority over, their own traditions.
- Returning to spirit over and over throughout the Circle. Spirit is always present to lead us.



## Spirit

As a committee, we struggled to find a word that would represent what we mean by spirit. We define it as connection to wholeness, connections to each other, to the earth, and to something bigger than our individual selves. We could not, however, come up with a better name, and were brought back to an appreciation of the word spirit from Darnell Johnson, a facilitator from Louisville:

*Spirit plays a part in every meeting. We did not have to create spirit through ritual or ceremony. It was already there. It is alive within all of us. We are all open to sharing that and getting into each other's space, eating each other's food, and really just sharing spirit with one another.*

We have also learned that it is important to be as inclusive as possible whenever we talk about spirit. Being aware of the many ways people might name spirit (Creator, ancestors, the divine, Allah, God, or Jesus) as well as nonreligious ways people might connect to spirit (speaking to the love and connection between people, noting a particular connection to one's child, or to nature) allows Circles to respect the diversity of its participants.



## Sharing Our Stories

### *Connecting Spirit and Action*

*For directions on how to use these questions in your Circle, see Sharing Our Stories, page 10.*

Spirit in Action believes that to build a transformative movement we need both spirit and action as part of our work. We define spirit as connection to wholeness, connections to each other, to the earth, and to something bigger than our individual selves. We define action as any act that moves us toward creating a more just and safe world for the future.

Remember an experience where feelings of spirit or heart motivated you to act for justice.

- What were the circumstances?
- What conditions allowed you to act on these feelings?
- What impact did these feelings have on the action?
- What were the ripple effects on you? On others?





*“Amazing Circle, our best so far. The greatest learning was the power of honesty and the power of invoking spirit. We decided to stop working so hard and instead to invoke spirit (and the winds outside blew wildly). There was something about letting go and relying on spirit in a wholehearted way that allowed for something deeper to happen in our circle.”*

—a Boston Circle facilitator

## Invitations to Spirit

### RATIONALE

Social justice work and the work of transformational movement building require enormous amounts of effort; for many it is exhausting. *Invitations to Spirit* creates an atmosphere in which all the ways that people connect to something larger than themselves—and to spirit—are honored, so that participants can bring this inspiration to the Circle and their work together.

### OUTCOME

Circle participants will connect to something bigger than themselves, as a source of inspiration.

**TIME NEEDED:** 15 minutes; 1 hour if followed by a discussion

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. Call the group to silence and asks participants to focus on their breathing, as a way to center themselves from within.
2. Ask everyone to connect to and invite spirit in a way that is comfortable and meaningful for them. In the initial explanation, you may want to give examples of how people have named spirit in other Circles. See *Spirit*, page 12. Spirit can be invited by acknowledging and calling it into the Circle, by reading a poem, by singing or playing the recording of a song, or by drumming; there are many possibilities. Suggest to other participants that they respectfully receive the invitations to spirit into the Circle, silently noting if anything comes up for them. (This can be addressed during a discussion at the end.) Make sure participants know that not everyone needs to speak. You may want to go first in order to model it.
3. End when you have the sense that everyone who has wanted to invite spirit, has had the chance to. Sit with the invitations for a few moments before moving into the rest of the meeting time. Or raise the energy of the Circle through singing or movement.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

We leave it to the facilitators and Circle participants to determine if conversations about differences with regards to spirit are necessary for the Circle to move forward and work together. For some groups, a discussion about faith traditions, religious

beliefs, and rituals is essential. For others, the opportunity for people to share their traditions, beliefs, and rituals is all that they need.

How does your connection to spirit as you name it inspire you to continue the work? Is spirit, as you invited it, connected to a religion, faith tradition, spiritual practice, atheism, the natural world? (Try to be inclusive even as you make this list. Ask if you have left anyone out.)

How can we hold the diversity of what inspires us to continue the work? Where do you need to stretch? Where have you been hurt? (Deep listening is essential to this conversation as it can be emotionally charged for some.)

What do you need to do to connect regularly, and in this Circle, with your source of inspiration?

## V A R I A T I O N S

See *Circle Openings*, page 88.

### Connecting with Spirit in My Community Work

by Phyllis Labanowski, Curriculum Project Coordinator

*The Circle I was in had recently ended. And the first project I volunteered to work on was with a local group of community members (farmers, educators, activists, environmentalists, and parents). We were invited to host an indigenous representative for the Kogi, the Arhuaco, and the Wiwa people of the Santa Marta mountains in northern Colombia. They consider themselves to be “the keepers of the heart of the world.” Our work was to prepare our community for the visit, to raise money for the representative, and to organize local events for when he arrived.*

*Carlos, my coconvener, and I had both been involved with Spirit in Action. We suggested to the group that we connect with spirit at the beginning of each meeting using the exercise Invitations to Spirit—after all, we were hosting an indigenous leader, who comes from a 2,000-year-old spiritual tradition. The group agreed with our idea. By connecting with spirit, we connected more deeply to each other. We shared meals. We created agreements to support our ability to work together over the next year and a half. At each meeting we had someone track our connection to and disconnection from each other and spirit. And, we invited two elders/activists to guide us. Our collective culture strengthened.*

*We were not without conflict. As often happens in a group of community volunteers, new folks would drop in. This dropping in and dropping out of volunteers has always been a challenge for me because of how it affects the group dynamics. Trying to get new members up to speed impacts the productivity of the folks who are already doing most of the work. Sometimes, new folks can be disruptive to a group’s process. And core group members, the ones who get things done, can be inadvertently disrespected. In this group though, connecting to spirit and to each other made protecting the core group a priority. We even suggested that people who missed meetings or were new to the group be quiet participants—a first in community meetings where I have volunteered. I came to see that another way of working in community is possible. And so, this experience strengthened my conviction to bring this work into other groups that I work with.*



*“The sharing of stories had a transformative effect on the group, making each of us accessible to each other and the possibility of collective action real.”*

—a Cape Cod facilitator

## Spirit in Action Journey Mapping (based on the work of Claudia Horwitz<sup>1</sup>)

### RATIONALE

There is wisdom already present in our lived experiences. When acknowledged this wisdom can be a base from which to build a transformational movement for peace and justice. Mapping our own journey serves to recover important events, people, places, and moments that define who we are in the context of our work for justice. Listening to the stories and seeing the maps of others deepens our knowledge and understanding of each other.

**TIME NEEDED:** 2+ hours

### OUTCOMES

Circle participants will:

- make the connection between spirit and action in our personal journeys.
- build bridges for understanding and respecting the choices and circumstances of others.

### MATERIALS

- music to play while people are drawing
- either a long sheet of paper big enough for everyone to draw on simultaneously or a sheet of paper for each participant
- art supplies: crayons, markers, collage materials, scissors, glue, etc.

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. Introduce the rationale of the spirit in action journey map. Explain that the intent of the activity is to have participants visually map out and reflect on the connections between spirit and action in their life journeys. Encourage people to be as visual as possible. Remind participants that the map doesn't have to be a linear or chronological representation. Using visual art forms like these are useful because the creative processes unpack what is strongest, most resilient, most wise, and most transformative in humanity.

<sup>1</sup> This is based on *Faith Map*, an exercise found in *The Spiritual Activist: Practices to Transform Your Life, Your Work and Your World* by Claudia Horwitz. See *Resources for Supporting Circles of Change*, page 108.

2. Ask the following questions to motivate and guide the fellow travelers. You can post them as well.

What are the highlights of your life story and your spirit journey?

What are the highlights of your life story and your social justice journey?

What were the ups and downs and pivotal moments?

Were there key people or events you want to mark in your journey?

What is the role of spirit on your journey?

What is the role of justice in your journey?

3. Allow people a few minutes to reflect on the questions before they begin. Provide 15–20 minutes to visually represent their journeys. (Remind folks when they have five minutes left.)

4. Ask participants to share their maps with each other in small groups of three to four people, using the questions as a guide. Share with them that storytelling is a powerful tool of personal and community discovery. If there's enough time, listeners can reflect on things they heard and were inspired by or ask questions. Suggest that each group take a moment of silence between presenters to let the experience and information be absorbed. (Some Circles share their maps in the large group because it is a way to begin to build community. If you decide to do this in your Circle, ask someone in the group to be a timekeeper so everyone has a chance to share.)

5. Return to the whole Circle. Display the maps and allow people to take a few minutes to view them.

6. End with some individual and/or group reflection time.

What wisdom came out of your story? In the stories of others?

What themes are common across our maps?

What did you learn about the role of spirit in our work for justice?

7. A one-word appreciation or a moment of silence can conclude the session.

### NOTES TO FACILITATORS

Usually, people want more time for this exercise, because they like the intimacy that it creates. So you'll want to make sure there is time for everyone to share.

### V A R I A T I O N S

Most Circles do this exercise early in the life of the Circle, in the second session. However, when one Circle did this toward the end of their sessions the participants, who already felt trust and familiarity, shared more deeply.

Another Circle asked participants to identify a question they were currently exploring in their lives and to write it on the map. These questions were used to open the next session.

One Circle displayed their maps at every session to be reminded of each other's journeys.



*A Core Strategy for Building a Broad-based Movement*

# *Healing from Divisions:*

## **Building A Diverse Movement**

Circles grow from the belief that building diverse community is not only possible, but also essential to making broad-based change in the United States. To enjoy the privilege and responsibility of being in diverse community, people are called to recognize that all share both a common humanity and particular social identities, which accord power in unbalanced ways. Bridging this power divide is at the heart of healing divisions.

**B**eing in diverse community is essential to making broad-based change in the United States. To enjoy the privilege and responsibility of being in diverse community, people are called to recognize that we share both a common humanity and particular social identities, which accord power in unbalanced ways. Bridging this power divide is at the heart of healing divisions. Circles shine a light on the need for the healing of the divisions that exist between people involved in working for positive social change. Although those who work for a better world may share similar visions, the realities of living in a structurally inequitable society shape the attitudes, behaviors, and interactions of us all. In order to confront the power, privilege, and oppression that grow from social identities, we who seek a better world are called to do our own personal change work. Circles can become a container for some of this work. Circles bring people together in community, where we are invited to struggle together—each person working on their own growth and healing as well as growth and healing for the whole.

**Circle participants are called to balance recognition of a common humanity with an acknowledgment of the influence of social identity and power imbalances.**

Although our humanness unites us, identities that we claim or that are attributed to us shape our life experiences and create power divisions between us. The damage of these divisions calls out for a healing that recognizes both our humanness and our social/political identities. Those of us interested in healing our divisions so that we can be in diverse community are seeking new ways that weave together these understandings. We need a compassionate process. We need a clear political analysis. And we need sacred spaces in which healing can take place. Sharing our stories has been critical to this work in Circles.

**Even as healing divisions exists as the vision, there is a recognition that there will always be conflict.** Neither individuals, Circles, nor social transformation will eliminate all sources of conflict. Conflict between people arises from many sources, including differing personal needs, opinions about political strategy, or core values. Exploring these conflicts in an atmosphere of support and community can actually be a source of great learning. Rather than seeing conflict as a problem, Circles can accept it as a reality and further explore what supports are needed to work through conflict. Deep listening and honest sharing can allow for nonconfrontational dialogue. Recognizing spirit can help.

**People cannot heal divisions with others unless they are also working to heal divisions within themselves.** We all have our own work to do, whether we experience being a target of societal prejudice and discrimination or receive unearned privilege. As we do our own work, our self-understanding increases, as does our understanding of how societal norms impact ourselves and our relationships with each other. We must seek to change ourselves if we wish to change the world. Circles, and the sense of community they provide, can further our individual work, which does not begin or end in a Circle. Until societal prejudice, discrimination, and unearned privilege are eliminated, individual transformation will be a lifelong process. This is the work of caring for the heart—our own and each others.



**The healing work of the Circles is best supported by participants' willingness to work on both internal conflicts and the conflicts in the wider world.** To engage in this work both in and out of Circles, facilitators can support participants to develop the following attitudes and skills:

- Sharing stories. In the context of a Circle, this calls all participants to share in a reciprocal way.
- Speaking honestly. The work of healing calls forth honest opinions and feelings, and Circle facilitators need to support honest speech on a full range of issues.
- Listening with empathy while simultaneously taking notice of the assumptions and judgments we may be making. The work of healing requires careful witness and is beyond quick solutions. Facilitators can structure exercises in ways that support participants to practice deep, intentional listening.
- Responding to each other's needs. People's unattended needs create unnecessary conflict. Facilitators need to be mindful of those needs. Cofacilitators can support each other in the process.
- Examining the perceptions we hold of those who are different from us. As these beliefs and perceptions surface and are examined, we can decide whether or not they are serving the work of social transformation.
- Being willing to be uncomfortable. Learning happens in the midst of some discomfort as old patterns and beliefs are shaken up. A facilitator's job is to foster experiences that create discomfort while maintaining enough support so that participants are not moved into panic. Facilitators can create this balance in the planning of Circle sessions and by facilitating reflection and dialogue. Invite participants to welcome rather than fear discomfort.

## Reflections on “Power With”

*“Patriarchal thinking, anchored in notions of domination and competition, is an expression of the power-over principle of relating. I firmly believe another way of thinking and relating is possible.”*

—Betty Burkes, Circle facilitator and member of the Curriculum Committee

The “power with” principle is fundamental to our relationships for transformational leadership and change. Learning, practicing, and committing to the “power with” principle means reshaping the structures of power upon which our culture is based, those which are presently shaping the destruction of the world. It is common for groups to stay in the old familiar mode of “power over” relationships supporting estrangement, isolation, and disconnection from each other. The “power over” principle sustains systems of domination, competition, and oppression. Facilitators should look for opportunities to explore and embody “power with” practices in Circles so that participants can experience collectively the joy and affirmation of co-creating “power with” relationships. Below is a list of basic underlying principles that can shift the power dynamic in Circles and overthrow the “power over” model. You may want to share these principle with your Circle.

- All life is sacred, diverse, and connected.
- Identities based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, etc. can be used as sources of estrangement and isolation.
- We are individually responsible for our feelings and actions, responsible for making requests to get our needs met, and accountable for commitments made to others.
- We are our own leaders, reorganizing principles of power to reflect cooperation, equality, and integrative relations that honor the wholeness of life.



## T H E I M P A C T O F “ P O W E R O V E R ”

*Understanding this legacy—millennia of “power over” relationships to each other—felt so important to us as a committee, that we added this essay to explain our understanding of it.*

### **Our human differences have been used to separate us.**

Being human means being different. We are each unique expressions of spirit. Yet institutions in the United States were created to privilege some and to deny access and privilege to others, based on our social identities (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, abilities, language, religion, age, etc.). Although these social identities do not make up all of who we are, they end up informing who we think we are and who others perceive us to be.

We are born into some of these identities (skin color) and may choose others (some religious affiliations). Some of our social identities are visible (gender) and others are invisible (sexual orientation). And some are more important to us (age) at different times in our lives. They come with unearned privileges (whites), while others among us are discriminated against (people of color). The full depth and breadth of our humanity is ignored and we are forced into categories and asked to check boxes that identify us for privileging and for discrimination. Understanding how our social identities are used by institutions, to create and maintain systems of advantage and discrimination, is critical for us in our Circles, in our action, and in our movement building.

### **We are likely to reproduce the roles we have been indoctrinated into in our Circles.**

It is impossible to live in a society that creates and maintains categories that are unnatural to our humanity and not internalize them, especially since these categories are based on the ideology that some of us are *innately superior* and others of us are *innately inferior*. We are likely to internalize the dominance, believing that we are superior. We may also be likely to internalize the exclusion, believing that we are inferior. Our challenge is to know who we really are and to simultaneously be aware of the fact that we have internalized roles that distort what is true. In Circles, we become careful observers of ourselves as individuals and as a group. It is important to notice how we consciously or unconsciously perpetuate narrow definitions of each other. Circles of Change require participants to take responsibility for our assumptions, our intentions, and our behaviors.

### **We need a different ideology.**

The movement we are building seeks to transform our beliefs and behaviors, as well as the social structures and political systems, that have been created as a result of the “power over” model. We need a revolutionary shift in our ideology, one that is based on shared power—power *with* others rather than power *over* others. This can only be accomplished by a movement that works toward justice for all, one that embraces and commits to love and nonviolence.



### **Internalized domination is difficult to change.**

People who have many dominant identities are faced with the impact of internalizing all kinds of domination and superiority. Generally, if you are white (a social identity that was constructed for the purpose of privileging and institutionalizing discrimination and exclusion), you probably possess other dominant identities. One of the committee members explored her own dominant identities like this:

*I am white. I am of European descent. I am a native English speaker. I am middle class (even though I was raised working class). I was raised Catholic (Christian). These identities follow my whiteness, like dominoes. Add to those identities that I'm heterosexual and able-bodied. I have many dominating identities. As a result, I have had a lifetime of opportunities to develop and internalize my sense of domination! Understanding power has been difficult for me as it is for most people who have many dominating identities. We have been taught not to see our own power, unearned privileges, and internalized sense of superiority. We may be reluctant to accept the stories and experiences of participants with excluded identities. Some of us have been shamed for the social identities we possess and may feel a paralyzing guilt that prevents us from speaking.*

Not surprisingly, people with many dominant identities are usually eager to explore our excluded identities. We are often extremely knowledgeable about the transgressions against any of the excluded identities we possess. The same committee member reflected on her excluded identities, "I have noticed gender discrimination all my life because I am female. Interestingly, I have committed far less time to exploring my dominating identities." We are more often interested in whether or not *other* dominant group members are exploring their privileges (i.e., white privilege, male privilege, class privilege, etc.). It's one of the privileges of dominance; we don't have to explore it. This can make for some difficult Circle dynamics. Circle facilitators can identify and draw on the clarity within themselves and of those participants who have taken time to work on these issues. We can be powerful role models to others trying to figure out how to walk in our identities with dignity.

### **We all have work to do on domination and how we enact "power over" others.**

Even people with many excluded identities possess dominant identities. For example, people of color can explore internalized dominance with regards to religion if they are Christian. Men of color can explore their internalized gender privilege. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual folks who are white can explore their internalized white supremacy. Older participants in mixed-aged groups can explore their adultism, while all native English speakers can explore linguisticism.

### **Internalized exclusion can be really painful.**

For those of us from excluded groups, not only do we suffer systemic and interpersonal oppression on a daily basis, but for many of us the most painful expression of oppression is internalizing the messages that bombard us from birth. We internalize that we are somehow "less than" the dominant group. We start to believe the messages that we hear about ourselves on a daily basis. Messages that we are less smart, less articulate, less able to do things—messages that what we have to say is not important or valuable, that our ways of expressing ourselves are not acceptable, that we don't look okay. Some of these messages are subtle—teachers' lower expectations of us; some are overt—being passed over for jobs and promotions, being targeted by police harassment and receiving harsher judicial punishments than our white counterparts. These messages are everywhere: on billboards, in magazines and on television—images of beauty as thin, white, European, and blonde; and images of poor people and people of color as stupid, inarticulate, and dirty. Collectively, these messages reinforce the stereotypes of our groups and affect our ability to be our whole selves in the world.

As we begin to understand oppression and fight back against these internalized messages, anger may be part of the natural step in reclaiming our selves. Sometimes this anger gets focused on all people

in the dominant group, even those who are our allies—because even if they don't mean to, they reinforce those messages in our mind. As another member of the Curriculum Committee reflected,

*When I am the only one among a group of middle class, college-educated people, my internalized feelings silence my participation. That causes shame on my part, which makes me feel even more inadequate, further silencing me. It becomes a vicious cycle.*

As members of excluded groups, we need to be willing to look at the dominant group, not as the “enemy” but as a partner in the process of social change work. We need to do the work together in order to heal divisions and move toward wholeness.

### **No one is exempt from the work of being a member in diverse Circle.**

Diverse Circles allow us to weave ourselves back together as one. They allow for each participant to contribute their perspectives and their gifts, all of which are required for a healthy collective. We are all needed if we are to heal the legacies of injustice.

Encouraging participants to observe their own and each others' behaviors, to withhold judgment, and to notice the impacts on group interactions, can disrupt this cycle that separates. Patterns often emerge. Understanding patterns of interactions, based on our social identities, can help name the power dynamics present in interactions in the Circle, at meetings and events in the community, etc. When we notice dynamics rooted in “power over,” we can challenge ourselves to move into “power with.” These questions can be useful in a Circle, to name and discuss power dynamics.

- How do we speak about power dynamics in a mixed group without continuing to harm each other and to create more pain?
- How can we look deeply into our own power dynamics and find ways that heal the dynamics rather than reproduce the oppression?

### **Learn the difference between group-level stereotyping and group-level observations.**

As a facilitator, caution participants against the dangers of *group-level stereotyping*, i.e., believing and acting on the assumption that all members of a group are “x” just because they are members of that group. *Group-level observations* that lead to understanding patterns are useful generalizations that allow us to see and discuss, respectfully, patterns that do exist for identity groups without stereotyping all members of that group. It is an important distinction to make. We need to be able to talk about group-level patterns together while respecting the integrity that each human being possesses.

For example, many white women are taught to be “nice” and “not to hurt people's feelings,” which often gets in the way of our being honest. It is a group-level pattern that repeats itself again and again, making it useful to know. However, it is not true for all white women—that is a group-level stereotype.

### **Love and compassion are powerful gifts that a facilitator brings into diverse Circles.**

Being able to talk about power and privilege, difference and discrimination, is part of our journey in diverse Circles. Facilitating requires that we do a lot of personal work, both spiritually and politically. We need to be aware of how oppression works. We need humility. We need to honor that people are more than their social identities and to believe that we really are unique expressions of spirit. We need clarity in the midst of difficult conversations most mixed groups inevitably have. As a result, love for the people willing to engage with others across our differences, and compassion for our weaknesses and shortcomings, are keys to the success of facilitating diverse Circles.



## Sharing Our Stories

### *Drawing on the Strength of Diversity*

*For directions on how to use these questions in your Circle, see Sharing Our Stories, page 10.*

When communities are at their best, they draw on the strength of their diversity. Each member brings different life experiences, ways of being and thinking, and expertise to the group. Honoring our differences in the service of our shared vision allows us to broaden trust and respect for each other while learning to more deeply understand the world around us.

Describe a time when you were part of a diverse group which really benefited from its diversity.

- How did you provide space for each other's unique gifts to emerge?
- What was special about what this group achieved?
- What allowed the group to be successful?

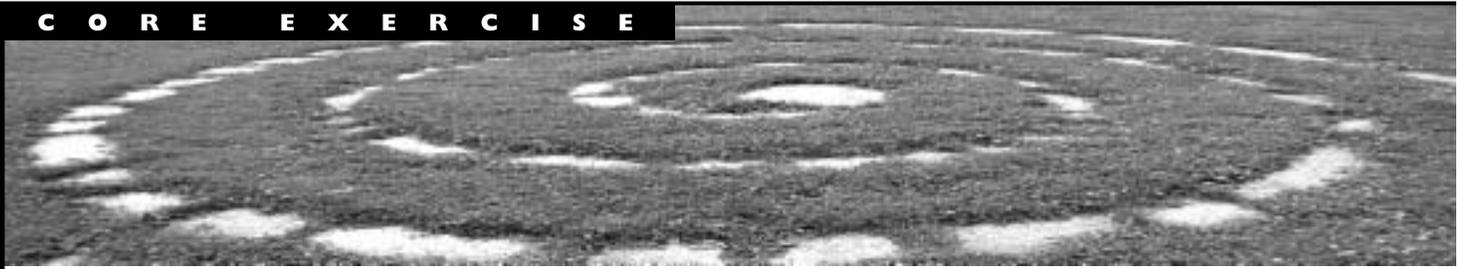
It takes courage to break ranks with the dominant culture and take action as an ally against oppression and violence. And it takes courage to overcome internalized oppression and reclaim our voices and our power. Our horizons widen when we discover a totally different way of viewing something.

Remember a time when you were stretched by a different perspective or challenged to change your worldview.

- What motivated you and/or allowed you to open to this new way of seeing?
- How has this changed you?

Change and growth are usually uncomfortable; but afterwards, in looking back, we are glad that they happened. Recall a time when you pushed yourself out of your comfort zone to spend time or collaborate with someone who was unlike yourself and felt good about it.

- What helped you do it?
- What was learned?



*“When filling out a form, a Circle participant described herself as ‘human, having embraced the “political” identities of Chinese-American, female, queer, working class-based, now middle class, artist/entrepreneur, 30s, and physically able.’”*

—the Evaluation Committee

## Stepping into the Circle<sup>1</sup>

### RATIONALE

Early on in Circles, participants could look around the room and see that they were a diverse group, but some felt that the diversity could have been more fully explored to support our *healing from divisions*. They asked for a simple exercise to bring awareness to the traditionally excluded identities present in the Circle.

### OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- name their own visible and invisible identities.
- become aware of the excluded identities present in the Circle and learn respectful language used to talk about those identities.

**TIME NEEDED:** 30 minutes

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

#### 1. Preparation

If you are unsure about your own understanding of excluded identity and respectful language currently used to name group memberships, see *Talking About Power and Oppression*, page 115 in the *Appendix*. It may also be useful to read *The Impact of “Power Over,”* page 21 to clarify your understanding of power dynamics between dominant and excluded groups.

Create a list of the *excluded* identities that you know Circle participants possess. For example:

- *Based on ethnic identities:* African American (or black); Native American, American Indian, First Nations people; Asian American, Southeast Asian, Asian Pacific Islander; Latino, Latina, or Hispanic; Arab or Middle Eastern
- *Based on socioeconomic class:* working class; working poor; people living in poverty
- *Based on sexual orientation and gender identities:* female; transgendered; gay; lesbian; bisexual; queer
- *Based on mental, emotional, social, and physical identities:* physically disabled; suffering from a chronic disease; have been diagnosed with a mental illness or an emotional or social disability

Healing  
from  
Divisions

<sup>1</sup> We have found that this exercise works best with at least ten participants.

- *Based on age:* over 60 years old; under 20 years old
- *Based on religious/spiritual identities:* Buddhist; Muslim; Jewish; Wiccan; agnostic; atheist
- *Based on native language:* (name the languages people speak) Spanish; Hebrew; Farsi; etc.
- *Based on citizenship:* immigrant; migrant

## 2. Leading the Activity

State the rationale for the activity: to explore excluded identities of those present in our Circle.

These identities have been historically excluded from power and privilege. Remind participants that we are more than our identities and that these group labels refer to political struggles that people have fought for, for generations—for the right to name ourselves and to be given dignity and respect.

Explain how the exercise works: you will be asked to step into the circle when a particular group is named, if you belong to that group and if you choose to identify your belonging. In some cases it will be obvious whether or not someone belongs to a particular group. In other cases, it will not be. In either case, the participant decides whether or not s/he wants to step into the circle and be identified as belonging to the group.

In some cases people may not know what is meant by an identity that is named. Let them know that as the facilitator, you will not be answering any questions about who does or doesn't belong to a particular identity; people should attach their own meaning to it and proceed accordingly. Make sure that participants understand that this exercise is an opportunity to self-identify so that the Circle can be aware of the identities present. Identification is voluntary. (Please note, however, that many of us have been forced to take on excluded identities as a result of living in the United States and these identities may not be significant to us. So some participants may not step into the circle to claim an identity that others believe they possess.)

Ask people to stand in a circle. Name one identity at a time. People step into the circle to identify as belonging to the group and then back out again. This is done in silence. This exercise works best if you name each of the identities in a particular category before going on to the next. For example, go through all of the ethnicities present in the Circle before moving on to socioeconomic class. Before moving on to the next category, ask if you have left anyone out. (Since this is an exercise to bring forward excluded identities, you don't want to leave anyone out.)

## 3. Ending the Activity

Before ending, give Circle participants an opportunity to name any other identities that they want Circle members to know. A participant can only name an identity group that they are part of. This provides an opportunity for Circle participants to learn what identities are significant to other participants. (For example, in one group a woman named "widow" as a significant identity. As it turned out there was another widow in the group. Naming and claiming this shared but invisible identity was important for the two participants and for the Circle as a whole.)

Ask people to pair up and debrief what they learned about the Circle as well as any feelings came up for them in doing this exercise. (If you have time you can debrief in the large group.)

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What surprised you most?
- How often did you step into the circle? How did that make you feel?
- What did you observe about the group as a whole?
- Do you have any new feelings or change any feelings about your own identity?
- Are there any questions about identity that you are taking away from this experience? What are they?
- How does the diversity of excluded identities present strengthen us?

## NOTES TO FACILITATORS

We have never figured out a good way to do this exercise if someone or several people in the group have difficulty walking. We have tried asking everyone to stay seated and to raise their hands to signify when they would be stepping in. While technically this works, it diminishes the physical impact of the exercise. If you have people with disabilities in your group, speak to them ahead of time and discuss how to do this exercise.

## V A R I A T I O N S

### Exploring and healing some of the pain of our excluded identities

Expand your list to include more “taboo” categories and group memberships, as well as more information about feelings that come from having to navigate certain excluded identities. Be prepared to spend more time in small and large groups processing the impact of this variation. Ask people to focus on the emotions that they feel. Some examples include, “Step into the circle if you”...

- Consider yourself “fat”
- Are now receiving or have ever received AFDC, food stamps, Medicaid
- Have experienced physical abuse
- Have experienced physical danger due to political beliefs/activities
- Felt badly because you couldn’t afford something that your friends could
- Lived in subsidized housing when you grew up
- Wore secondhand or hand-me-down clothing when you were young
- Are the first one in your family to go to college
- Felt ashamed because of what you didn’t have
- Felt embarrassed to tell someone what your parents do/did
- Are a member of a union
- Felt angry when someone wished you a Merry Christmas because you didn’t celebrate Christmas
- Didn’t stand up on a prior question because of fear or embarrassment

### Naming all of the identities present and the strengths that come with them

Depending on the needs of your Circle, you may find it important to name all of the identities in a particular category, both excluded and dominant. (Again, refer to *Talking About Power and Oppression* on page 115 in the *Appendix*.) For example, when talking about socioeconomic class, in addition to: working class, working poor, people living in poverty, you can also name the other class identities: middle class, upper middle class, and owning class. This will allow an opportunity for everyone to step into the circle.

In addition, when people step into the circle, rather than remaining silent, invite each person to name a strength or value that they possess as a result of their identity. For example, if someone steps into the circle as a person from the working class, they might say “great at finding good deals” or “can make a dollar stretch a long way.” A person from the upper middle class might say “value being generous.” This is a powerful way to demonstrate that we all possess identities in each category and that we all draw on the strengths and values we learned from the identities.





*“We know that it’s time to change the systems of oppression and to learn to act towards each other in profoundly different ways.”*

—Sharif Abdullah<sup>1</sup>, a leading proponent and catalyst for inclusive social, cultural, and spiritual transformation

## Uprooting the Consciousness of Oppression

(based on the work of YouthBuild<sup>2</sup> and the Women’s Theological Center<sup>3</sup>)

### RATIONALE

Oppression is a pattern or system of inequality based on attitudes and beliefs that gives privileges and power to members of one group of people at the expense of another. When society is organized to value some more than others, based purely on these differences the system demeans us all. Human beings are not born with oppressive attitudes and beliefs. They are learned at an early age. And so, we can unlearn them. In these times nothing less than a dramatic change in human consciousness will release us from the dehumanizing prison of identity politics and steer us towards justice.

### OUTCOMES

Circle participants will:

- deepen their understanding of four ways society is organized to oppress some and privilege others, called *The Four Is of Oppression*.
- inquire into a change in consciousness that creates relationships based on connection and compassion and how we can use this consciousness in our activism.

**TIME NEEDED:** 2+ hours

### MATERIALS

- a flip chart outline of *The Four Is of Oppression*
- a flip chart outline of *The Four Is of Relationship*
- extra flip chart paper and markers

## Part I: Understanding Oppression in the United States

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. Brainstorm definition of *prejudice* on flip chart paper, writing all of the ideas given. Tease out a definition—to *make a set of assumptions about another person or group based on hearsay*. Discuss how prejudice can be generalized about a group based on race, gender, etc. or about an individual. Include these key points:

<sup>1</sup> See [www.commonway.org](http://www.commonway.org) for more information about Abdullah’s work and *Resources for Supporting Circles of Change*, page 109 for more about his book, *Creating a World that Works for All*.

<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive youth and community development program and alternative school; see [www.youthbuild.org](http://www.youthbuild.org) for more information.

<sup>3</sup> An organization founded in 1982 that does work on spiritual leadership, which it defines as the practice of living on purpose, in spirit, and for justice. For more information go to <http://thewtc.org>.

- Prejudice can be negative—*Women are bad drivers*—or they can appear to be positive—*Asians are smart at math*. In both cases the generalizations are a distortion.
- Prejudice can be directed towards any individual or group; those with power—*White people are rich*—or those without—*Poor people are lazy*.
- You can be prejudiced towards a group you are part of.

2. Brainstorm the meaning of *oppression* on flip chart paper, writing all of the ideas given. Tease out a definition—*oppression is the expression of a prejudice that is systematically reinforced by society through laws, policies, and social custom*. In this exercise we are examining oppression as it applies to groups of people whose full humanness is denied (women, people of color, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, poor, elders, young people, Jews, disabled). Make clear that oppression occurs at the institutional level and is not merely individual acts of meanness. For a list of oppressions in the United States and which groups are advantaged and privileged and which are excluded from those privileges, see pages 115 and 116, *Talking About Power and Oppression*.

3. Compare the definitions and discuss the difference between prejudice and oppression. In the United States oppression has historically occurred by excluding and targeting some groups as innately inferior. For example, racism targets people of color as innately inferior while whites are believed to be innately superior. As a result, whites are advantaged through the institutionalization of racism by being given access to economic, social, and political power.

4. Brainstorm a list of the targeted or excluded groups and the advantaged or dominant groups in the United States. Again, see pages 115 and 116 for the language we recommend using when you talk about excluded and dominant identities.

5. Introduce *The Four Is of Oppression* using the flip chart outline you have prepared. With each “I” ask participants to come up with some examples. Allow time for discussion, questions, and understanding. Listen for examples of institutionalized oppression: racism, sexism, classism, etc. raised in the discussion. Capture these on the flip chart. (This list will be useful in *Theater of the Oppressed*, page 32.)

6. After you feel the group has understood the concepts of *The Four Is of Oppression* and dominant and excluded groups, ask participants to meet in pairs to discuss the following questions. Suggest to participants that they share stories from their lives to anchor their discussion in reality.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Which identity/identities put you in the *excluded group*?

Which identity/identities put you in the *dominant group*?

What identity/identities are most important to you and why?

What form of oppression do you feel most affected by?

Do you remember encountering an ally while being excluded or being an ally for someone who was excluded?

What have you learned about identity development that hinders and/or promotes justice?

7. To close, invite Circle members to share an experience from their partner’s stories that inspired them.



## The Four Is of Oppression (based on the work of YouthBuild)

### Ideological Oppression

The *idea* that the dominant group is defined as superior or as the norm.

more intelligent	more capable	more advanced
harder working	more deserving	more chosen/superior
stronger		

The *dominant group* holds this *idea* about itself and sets the *norms* and *standards* of society. *Other groups* are excluded and are attributed with opposite *ideas*.

### Institutional Oppression

The *idea* gets *embedded* in the institutions (an established organization or system with influence, power, and impact on the public) of society.

the laws	educational systems	public policies
the legal system	political power	housing development
police practices	hiring policies	media

### Interpersonal Oppression

The *idea* of superiority that gets *embedded* in institutions gives permission and reinforcement for individual members of the *dominant group* to personally disrespect or mistreat individuals in the *excluded groups*.

racist jokes	beatings/abuse	insults
stereotypes	harassment	invisibility
threats	belittling	
pornography	mistreating	

Most people in the *dominant group* are not consciously mistreating or demeaning the *excluded groups*. They have internalized the *ideas* and negative messages presented by society.

### Internalized Oppression

The *excluded group* internalizes the *idea* of inferiority for themselves and superiority for the *dominant group* and experiences disrespect personally.

The *dominant group* internalizes the *idea* of superiority for themselves and inferiority for *excluded groups* which gets lived in unconscious and indisputable ways.

## Part II: Uprooting Oppression

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. Explain that changing the systems of oppression means facing our personal and collective responsibility for the way things are as well as claiming the power to personally and collectively change them. In pairs, ask each person to share a time when s/he stood up to some form of oppression and promoted justice without using violence. What made it possible? What was the ripple affect? Allow 15 minutes for people to share their stories with each other.
2. In the whole group, have each person in the pair share what was inspiring about their partner's story. Identify the common elements in the stories which enable people to stand up to oppression. Capture the elements on flip chart paper.
3. Present *The Four Is of Relationship* using the flip chart outline. Explain that it is a framework from the Women's Theological Center, which holds spiritual leadership at its center and enables people to strengthen communities, bridge differences, and work toward social justice. *The Four Is of Relationship* describes the values, beliefs, and actions for shifting the paradigm of power and changing our individual and collective consciousness. With each "I" ask participants for examples. Allow time for discussion, questions, and understanding. Capture the discussion on flip chart paper.

4. After you feel the group has understood the concepts of *The Four Is of Relationship*, again, ask participants to meet in pairs to discuss the following questions. Suggest to participants that they share stories from their lives to anchor their discussion in reality. Encourage participants to listen carefully for what they can learn from each other about what is possible.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Share a time when you experienced or observed organizing efforts that modeled the principles of *The Four Is of Relationship*.

How can you imagine using this learning in your activism work?

How has your consciousness been affected by learning about the “Is” of oppression and relationship?

5. To close, invite Circle members to share an experience from their partner’s stories that inspired them.

### NOTES TO FACILITATORS

The dimensions of oppression presented in Part I of this exercise can be confusing. The shift in consciousness presented in Part II can be new. As a result, this exercise, more so than others in the curriculum, requires a skilled facilitator who has done their own work on the concepts presented. To help you with your own understanding see *Reflections on “Power With,”* page 20, *The Impact of “Power Over,”* page 21, and the chart on pages 115 and 116 in *Talking About Power and Oppression*.

## FLIP CHART OUTLINE

### The Four Is of Relationship based on the Women’s Theological Center’s definition of spiritual leadership

#### Ideological Relationship

The *idea* that the individual is part of the larger whole. An injury to one is an injury to all. Spiritual leadership works to understand and honor:

shared vision, mission and history	equity
all life is sacred, valued	belonging
interconnection	interdependence

#### Institutional Relationship

The *idea* of wholeness, interconnectedness, and life as sacred gets embedded in the institutions of society. Spiritual leadership works to create structures that justly distribute resources and support full and diverse participation.

the laws	educational systems	public policies
the legal system	political power	housing development
police practices	hiring policies	media

#### Interpersonal Relationship

The *idea* of wholeness that gets embedded in institutions supports and reinforces the realization that individuals are equal partners in a cooperative society. Spiritual leadership works to develop and tend one-on-one relationships that draw out our gifts and inspire transformation.

humor rather than oppressive jokes	nonviolence	kindness
erotic art rather than pornography	power with	encouragement

#### Internalized Relationship

Individuals internalize the *idea* of wholeness living in self-aware and self-actualizing ways. Spiritual leadership works to deepen awareness of ourselves as part of a larger whole.

power from within	appreciation	nonjudgmental
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*“I feel that we need more than to know what’s going on in our heads as internalized oppressions. We need more than to discuss objective situations. We need not just to modify ourselves, but to modify society itself.”*

—Augusto Boal, Brazilian theatre director and cultural activist

## Theatre of the Oppressed

(based on the work of Augusto Boal<sup>1</sup>)

### RATIONALE

Theatre of the Oppressed was developed by Augusto Boal during the 1950s and 1960s. From his work Boal evolved various forms of improvisation, dialogue, and audience participation used as a creative and innovative approach to explore issues of oppression. The performance is a training ground for action not only in the dramatization, but in real life.

### OUTCOME

Circle participants will use role playing to problem-solve ways to interrupt oppression, encountering our individual and collective capacity to be courageous and clear in real life.

**TIME NEEDED:** 2 hours

### MATERIALS

- index cards
- flip charts that captured examples of oppressions from *Uprooting the Consciousness of Oppression*

### OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

Role playing is used to re-create a scene or story from life, depicting an encounter with a specific oppression: racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, etc. It dramatizes one person’s experience, the *protagonist*, who is trying to deal with an encounter with oppression, an encounter that fails because of the resistance of one or more obstacles, the *antagonist*. The story or scene is dramatized several times for the rest of the Circle participants, who become the *audience*.

During the first dramatization, the *audience* merely observes. During the second dramatization, anyone from the *audience* can interrupt the story by shouting “freeze,” at which point the *protagonist* and *antagonist* stop their action and the *protagonist* is replaced by whoever yelled “freeze.” The dramatization continues to its end. Although the *antagonist* is not replaced, the changes in *protagonist* provide a dynamic interplay that can affect every actor. The dramatization can be repeated and the *protagonist* replaced several times, depending on the audience’s degree of satisfaction with the outcome. Once a satisfactory outcome is achieved, the audience invariably applauds. The facilitator invites discussion.

<sup>1</sup> See [www.toplab.org](http://www.toplab.org) for other interactive theatre techniques that can be used to analyze and explore solutions to problems of power and oppression.

## STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. Help Circle participants select the issues and/or oppressions they want to explore. If you captured examples of oppressions in Part I of the exercise, *Uprooting the Consciousness of Oppression*, you can hang those flip charts up and draw from those examples.
2. Pass out index cards and ask participants to write down an incident in which they encountered that issue or oppression, one in which they were involved or witnessed. Real-life incidents work best.
3. Divide into small groups of three to four people. Ask groups to pick an incident to work on. Provide 20–30 minutes for each small group to create the story line to dramatize the incident for performance. Encourage the groups to discuss the incident and develop and rehearse their dramatization.
4. Reassemble as a large group and select the order of performances.
5. Explain the guidelines before the dramatizations begin.
  - The group presents their dramatization without interruption.
  - The same group presents their dramatization again but this time any member of the audience can stop the performance by yelling “freeze,” replacing the *protagonist*. The new *protagonist* takes on the character and brings a different response to the action.
  - The dramatization can be repeated and the *protagonist* replaced several times, until the audience feels the incident has been successfully resolved.
  - After the applause, the facilitator will lead a discussion with the whole group about the emotions they are feeling, the observations they made, and the learning that can be gleaned from the performance.
  - The cycle begins again with a different group performing their dramatization.
6. After the dramatizations, you may want to end with reflection.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What did you learn about oppression that you didn't know before by role playing?
- How did acting rather than just listening help you understand oppression?
- What did you learn about how to take action against oppression?
- How can you imagine using what we've learned here today, when you leave this Circle?

## NOTES TO FACILITATORS

The group needs to have some basic understanding of issues of power and forms of oppression in society before using this exercise. Using this exercise as a follow-up to *Uprooting the Consciousness of Oppression*, page 28, can enhance the power of the performances.

## Coming from a Place of Knowing That Healing Really Needs to Happen

by Bethsaida Ruiz, San Francisco Circle facilitator and member of the Curriculum Committee

I was in a Circle that mostly consisted of white women and I was the only woman of color. As part of an ongoing process the group decided to name the oppressive dynamics in the Circle, the dynamics that kept the divisions between us in place. I named that I was the only woman of color and that I wanted other people of color in the group so I didn't have to be the one to name racism and the norms of racism that operated in the group.

One white woman took it away from me and made it about her. And this was one of the dynamics I was talking about and here it was, happening right in the moment. It was really painful—I felt like a victim! I know that I am not a victim; I am a really powerful woman. But, it's hard to feel like it when I am the only person of color in the group.

I spent time processing what happened between meetings with both women of color and white allies. When we came back together again, I reported how I was painfully affected by the process and that it was

difficult for me to continue with this particular process of naming the dynamics of racism as the only woman of color in the group. We each spoke about how the Circle participants felt about the process from the previous meeting. I got a lot of support from most of the women in the Circle, but one woman declared that she didn't spend any time thinking about the last session. I was extremely puzzled and realized that this is the impact of racism for both people of color and white people. I spent most of the month agonizing over the impact of naming the dynamic and she didn't think about it.

I struggled. Feeling alone in that Circle didn't feel good to me. Do I stay and we invite people of color into our Circle? Do I leave? Either way the dynamics of the Circle would change. We need to create ways of being together that names what divides us. And, we need ways to heal from those divisions. It's not just people of color who need to heal, white folks need to do some healing also.



*“Creating a transformational movement requires a comprehensive look at the history of revolutionary movements within this country and others, to figure out what worked well in the past and what we need to do differently in the context of current times.”*

—Linda Stout, Spirit in Action founder and director

## Understanding Movements

**Please Note:** This exercise begins the week before the session in which it is presented. Circle participants are asked to select a movement to research and then present what they have found as part of this session.

### RATIONALE

History is a great teacher. Each new movement integrates the lessons learned from the past and brings new insights into the present. We can learn from the wisdom and courage of those who have dedicated their lives to that aim. We can learn how to heal divisions in order to work together. Inquiry into movements of the past and present, studying the stories of movement building, learning from the victories and failures, understanding the weakness and strengths, appreciating the limitations and restraints, is a foundation upon which we can build, moving the struggle for justice forward in our time. This exercise gives participants both an opportunity to study the history of social justice movements and to reflect on their own experience and involvement in that history.

### OUTCOME

Circle participants will generate ideas for building a diverse and transformational movement from lessons gleaned from the past and their own and each others' stories of participation.

**TIME NEEDED:** 2 hours

### MATERIALS

- a time line prepared on flip chart paper or butcher paper highlighting movements and dates (consider including: labor movement, civil rights, women's liberation, anti-war, GLBT/human rights campaign, disability movement, etc.) We have included *Project South Movement Building Timeline: Work and Wages*<sup>1</sup> page 36, to help you.
- small Post-its in multiple colors

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. Introduce the movement time line inviting participants to read the dates and history. Provide time for Circle participants who volunteered at the last session to make a presentation. Invite other Circle participants to add dates and details to the time line. Add other movements to the time line as well.
2. In small groups, ask participants to reflect on the following questions:
  - What information on the time line had you never heard of?
  - What points in history seem to be the most powerful for you?
  - What movements were most successful in building diverse coalitions?

<sup>1</sup> Created by Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide. They provide training for grassroots leaders, movement building resources, and serve to connect progressive activists with one another. See: [www.projectsouth.org](http://www.projectsouth.org).

What movements do you feel you are/have been a part of?

What movements do you feel you want to be a part of?

3. Ask the small groups to reconvene in the whole group. Hand out small, color-coded Post-its to each person. Invite them to write their responses to the following questions on the Post-its.

Where should you be included on this time line?

What movements have you participated in? In what ways?

Invite participants to share their own stories and to place themselves, via their Post-its, on the time line.

4. To end, invite participants to discuss movement building based on their own knowledge, experience, and the discussion they just had.

### REFLECTION QUESTION

What can we take from this exercise to inform our work about building a diverse and broad-based transformational movement?

### NOTES TO FACILITATORS

This is a stimulating exercise for seasoned activists as well as those new to activism. Knowing history can be both inspiring and motivating in the present moment. Because social justice movements are about people, everyone can find themselves in this history. It validates our power with others who have traveled this journey for justice before us and with those who are currently in the struggle. Getting participants to tell their stories and share knowledge enriches the experience. Asking people to select different movements to research and report on seems to give the Circle some ownership for developing the time line. However, if no one volunteers to do any research, the exercise can still work by drawing on the experiences of those present.

## MOVEMENT-BUILDING EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Sometimes Circles need to be reminded of or need to understand how movements build over time. The New World Foundation<sup>2</sup> describes four stages of movement building that we have found useful in understanding movements. (There are many versions of the stages of movement building, any one of which can be used here.) The descriptions can be enlarged at a copy center so they can be hung on a wall and read at a distance by a group.

### MATERIALS

- poster-size charts of the *Stages of Movement Building*, page 37.
- self-adhesive, colored dots

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. Pose a question to explore as a group, and then collect “data” by using different colored dots to code the group’s responses. For example:

- Put a dot next to all of the signs of movement building that you are currently witnessing locally and nationally.
- Put a dot (each person gets their own color) next to all of the statements that are true for your own (current) participation in movement building.
- Put a dot next to the movement-building work going on in our community around (name a specific issue).
- Or, pose your own question to explore. Figure out as a group how to color-code the responses.

2. The discussion and story sharing that follows helps participants to understand and reflect on movement building. This learning can be applied to your Circle as you think strategically about movement-building efforts in your own community and the next steps participants may want to take.

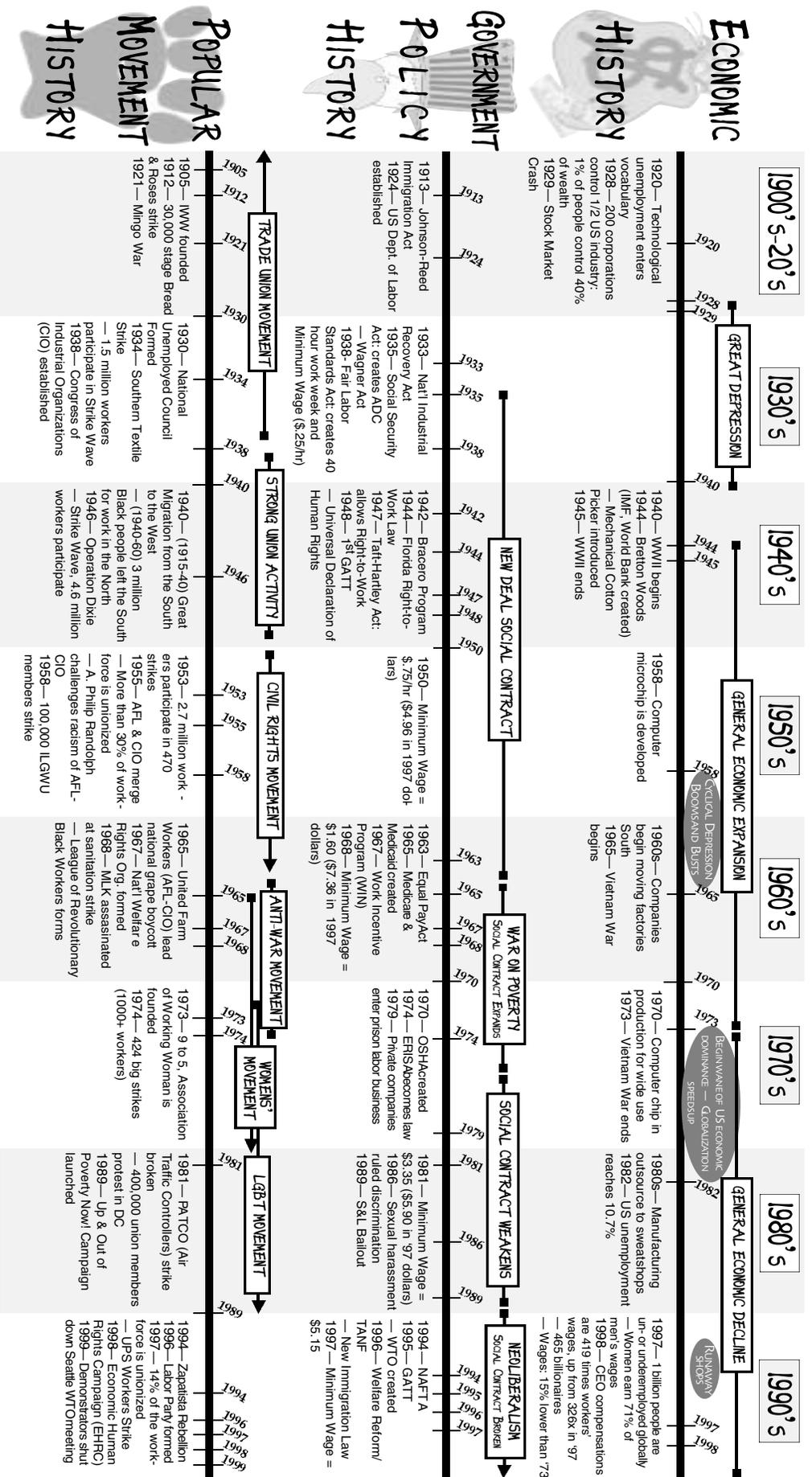
<sup>2</sup> Presented in The New World Foundation’s booklet, *Funding Social Movements: The New World Foundation Perspective*. For more information: see [www.newwf.org](http://www.newwf.org).



# Work and Wages

PROJECT SOUTH  
MOVEMENT BUILDING TIMELINE

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Healing from Divisions

## Stages of Movement Building

*based on the work of the New World Foundation*

### Stage 1: Building Movement Infrastructure of organizations, networks, and leaders

The breadth of the movement depends on the breadth of the infrastructure, which demands new levels of leadership, consciousness, and collaboration.

Movement grows through organizing centers, institutions, and networks.

New organizations and transformed existing organizations serve as anchors.

Internal grapevines, circuit riders, networks, and strategy circles are generated.

Allies are enlisted in advocacy groups, service agencies, elected officials, churches, unions, schools, etc.

Capacity to link multiple streams of activism and leadership across sectors, regions, ethnicities, generations, etc. develops.

The spectrum of public opinion and multiple lines of communication expand.

The movement acquires direction.

### Stage 2: Building Identity and Intention—mass activism with stamina, focus, and intensity to challenge existing power structure gives new urgency to social change

Consciousness-raising activities define the vision that guides participation forward, deepens commitment to the cause, and exposes the power structure.

Organizations promote collaboration over fragmentation among constituencies.

An integrated social agenda is developed (versus a laundry list of special issues and one shot successes).

The movement grows broad and deep:

- creating new levels of work while keeping the home infrastructure strong.
- reaching border allies without diluting core goals.
- respecting cultural diversity and ideological pluralism while maintaining a sense of common cause.
- struggling constructively around priority of base building versus alliance building.

Leadership expands vertically and horizontally, from grassroots to the movement center.

Great leaders are attracted, tested, and forged. They are tied to a core base, resist co-option by partial gains, withstand backlash and repression, are accountable to their organizations, put collective advance ahead of personal prominence, and think strategically beyond symbolic and tactical victories.

### Stage 3: Social Combustion—the Movement Moment—A series of moments happens in many places all at once that is collective and transformational (changing our concepts of what is possible in the human condition and natural to life on the planet)

Spontaneous waves of social combustion produce new and spontaneous waves of mobilization.

There is a profound shift in the moral legitimacy, expanding of the democratic terrain, and a rise in social expectations that changes the parameters of social conscience, consciousness, and courage.

People speak power to truth.

What seemed impossible to one generation is inevitable to the next.

Mobilization that is rooted in a broad spectrum of support takes place from the front lines to the mainstream, across generations, and even into sectors of the most powerful.

Our sense of community is stronger, civil society is richer, political issues are more compelling (and contentious).

Music and anthems emerge.

### Stage 4: Consolidation or Dissipation—a world view of a generation has been shaped and the next generation has been seeded

Sustainability is difficult; vested power interests regroup, through reform or repression. Power dissipates or consolidates.

- **Dissipation** (exhaustion): the center is satisfied, leadership is co-opted into elite circles, the bottom is sold out. (**Please Note:** *Spirit In Action* is dedicated to preventing dissipation from becoming an inevitability.)

- **Consolidation** (structural change): new organizations and institutions are built, new laws and instruments of power are exercised, tensions between militant and moderate change remain alive.

The movement-building process begins again.



# I Am From ...

(based on the work of Linda Christensen<sup>1</sup>)

## RATIONALE

Part of building a diverse community is allowing people the space to share their personal stories—stories of history, of family, of culture, and of identity. Intended to bring people closer, writing “I am from...” poems is a way for people to share aspects of their cultural identity, often as it relates to ethnicity, even if they aren’t aware of their own culture. It can open the way for the beauty of culture to shine through.

## OUTCOME

Circle participants will capture pieces of their own cultural heritages and share with each other.

**TIME NEEDED:** 45 minutes

## MATERIALS

- a flip chart paper with the guidelines for each stanza written on it; see below
- “I am from ...” poems written by the facilitators

## STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

I. Invite people to share something about their family/culture/childhood in the form of a poem, the kind of poem everyone can write even if they don’t think of themselves as poets. Describe the process.

I am going to say the words *I am from* followed by a set of words. I want you to write on your paper *I am from* and then follow with whatever train of thought comes to you about those words. After one or two minutes, I will ask you to write *I am from* again followed by a different set of words. There does not have to be any rhyming or even sentences, just the words/images which you connect with the phrase.

The four stanzas are:

*I am from ...* (familiar sights, smells, sounds from inside and outside your home, where you grew up)

*I am from ...* (familiar foods, especially those associated with holidays)

*I am from ...* (familiar expressions you grew up hearing, written in the language you heard them in)

*I am from ...* (the names of your ancestors and relatives)

<sup>1</sup> This exercise was developed by a public school educator in Portland, Oregon, in response to her students. She noted that exercises designed to bring cultures forward (such as the open-ended invitation to bring an object of your culture) resulted in alienating people, particularly white people of European descent who don’t see themselves as having a culture and people who are adopted. See Christensen, Linda, *Reading, Writing and Rising Up: Teaching about Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word* (2000), published by Rethinking Schools, Ltd. and available at: [www.rethinkingschools.org](http://www.rethinkingschools.org).

2. Because people can have very different ideas about the final poem, which can lead to some people feeling embarrassed about their writing style rather than the content, it is helpful to share your own “I am from” poem. This will give people an idea of the format.
3. Read one stanza at a time. Allow a couple of minutes for people to write. After all four stanzas have been read, give participants a few minutes to re-read their poems and to edit them if they wish.
4. Invite each person to read their poem and ask the group to pause after each poem to absorb its beauty/impact.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What did you learn about yourself?

What power was there in reading your own words?

What was it like to hear the poetry of others?

How do these poems work to build community?

What can we do to allow others the space to be who they are and where they are from, right here in our Circle?

### I am from ...

by Cathy Hoffman, Boston Circle facilitator and member of the Curriculum Committee

*I am from* the bustle of Harvard Square and the zinging of pinball machines at Hazen's.

*I am from* the roar of the Maine ocean and the rush of truck traffic on River Street.

*I am from* a study with books from floor to ceiling and the recitation of Shakespeare over dinner.

*I am from* grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup, steak, frozen peas and baked potatoes.

*I am from* turkey with Pepperidge Farm stuffing, real cranberry sauce and mashed potatoes.

*I am from* pancakes on Sunday with Vermont maple syrup and cereal for breakfast every morning.

*I am from* “I hope your children give you as much trouble when you are a mother” and “the TV set is still warm.”

*I am from* Tiny and Fenno, Granny and Gump, and Grammy.

*I am from* the Mayflower and WASPs back to the Finnish.

*I am from* Howard Zinn, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the rest who have marched for peace and justice.

*A Core Strategy for Building a Broad-based Movement*

# *Collective Visioning for a Positive Future*

Vision is a foundation for action. The work of visioning has an intrinsic connection to action for change—a continuum that includes personal change work, relationship and community building, and direct political action to enact systemic change. Collective visioning supports the work on all these levels. As we work to change ourselves, create our concrete images of a positive future, and vision collectively, we are taking steps toward change enacted on a societal scale.

Circles support our collective imagination of a positive future, and this inspired future serves as a foundation for the work of making deep and lasting social change. Many have drawn on the investigations of Fred Polak, a Dutch futurist in the early 1970s who examined 1,500 years of Western beliefs. He concluded that a society's image of itself becomes a road map for its future: those societies with positive and vital images flourish while those with uninspired images stagnate. As part of the Circles, participants are invited to collectively vision decades into our future, supporting us to articulate and work toward what we are for rather than what we are against. It also grows from Spirit in Action Director Linda Stout's decades of work to encourage long-term positive visions of the future. In the 1980s and early '90s, Linda founded and directed the Piedmont Peace Project (PPP), a multiracial group of low-income activists working on peace and justice issues in a conservative region of North Carolina. Despite opposition by conservative politicians and intense harassment by the Ku Klux Klan, PPP succeeded in cleaning up a local toxic waste site, registering 44,000 new voters, and shifting their Congressman's voting record on peace issues from zero to 83 percent. Long-term visioning was part of the PPP culture that supported people's ability to believe in success despite the odds they faced. Imagining 25 years into the future was included as part of PPP's staff meetings, community organizing activities, and donor events.

**An orientation toward positive possibilities is needed.** Many of us, activists included, are steeped in traditions of critique and criticism. An understanding of what is not working in society has been necessary to understand how oppression operates on the systemic, interpersonal, and individual levels. However, it needs to be combined with a mental, emotional, and spiritual understanding of what is possible as we move toward our highest values and hopes. Without this inspiration, we can lose hope that another world is possible.

**Both grounding in current positive realities and creative leaps of imagination are building blocks of visioning work.** In these times, those who work for equality, justice, peace, and sustainability seem to face a daunting task. However, a great history of social movements began with visions when change seemed equally impossible. Facilitators encourage Circle participants to anchor their collective visioning in the possibilities that exist in their own local communities. Currently realities we know exist can provide the spark of inspiration for imagining more widespread shifts on the societal level. We are able to transcend limits and make connections beyond what seems possible in the current context. Meditations are led, pictures drawn and murals created, giving the work an increased specificity and power. We have found that through these creative processes, a concrete picture of abstract words, such as equality or love, emerges to share with others.

**Circles visioning is a collective activity.** Individuals, groups, and whole societies can engage in an exploration of our desired futures. Circles focus on the collective level. As participants share their ideas and images of the future, they come to see both commonalities and differences. There is no



singular vision of the desired world; instead there are multiple streams of visions that grow from each individual's particular life experiences and areas of knowledge. These streams are interdependent.

**Vision is a foundation for action.** The work of visioning has an intrinsic connection to action for change—a continuum that includes personal change work, relationship and community building, and direct political action to enact systemic change. Collective visioning supports the work on all these levels. As we work to change ourselves, create our concrete images of a positive future, and vision collectively, we are taking steps toward change enacted on a societal scale.

To engage in visioning work both in and out of Circles, facilitators can support participants to develop the following attitudes and skills:

- Taking risks, particularly to engage in something new. Many of us are unfamiliar with visioning work, and this unfamiliarity contributes to skepticism. Those who are able to put skepticism aside and dip a toe into the new way of looking at the world generally find it rewarding.
- Developing a willingness to engage with right-brained tools such as the arts and visualizations. Although many of us have been conditioned to think that we are not creative or artistic, the tools of the imagination are available to us all, even if we do not feel very artistic. The purpose of the activity is not to create great art but to support creative and innovative thinking.
- Cultivating hope and possibility. In a Philadelphia Circle two women of color spoke of how there was no social change situation about which they felt hopeless. They speculated that African Americans like themselves hold onto hope because, if they believed that things could not change, they would become depressed. This hope and belief in the possibility of change fueled the southern civil rights movement and other movements to achieve many of their dreams and radically alter U.S. society. It can fuel Circle participants to take action as well.
- Having patience. Change, especially the kind that calls for deep transformation of individuals and institutions, takes time. If we look at history, we see the kind of time that is needed for change to take place. We can look at the movement for gay and lesbian civil rights in the U.S., beginning with a growth spurt in the 1950s and culminating in court recognition of same-sex marriage in 2004. This story twists through a landscape of individual empowerment and healing, political organizing, and legal and societal recognition. There is no shortcutting the time needed for making political change.



## Sharing Our Stories

### Hope

*For directions on how to use these questions in your Circle, see Sharing Our Stories, page 10.*

Looking at the state of the world today can create both great despair and great inspiration. Much is happening now and has happened in the past to make the world a more peaceful, just, equitable, and loving place. Cornell West writes in his book, *Restoring Hope*, “The country is in deep trouble. We need ... the courage to question the powers that be, the courage to be impatient with evil and patient with people, and the courage to fight for social justice. Such courage rests on a deep democratic vision of a better world that lures us and a hope that sustains us. This hope is not the same as optimism. We know that the evidence does not look good. Hope enacts the stance of the participant who actively struggles against the evidence in order to change the deadly tides of wealth inequality, group xenophobia (racial intolerance), and personal despair. Only a new wave of vision, courage, and hope can keep us sane—and preserve the decency and dignity requisite to revitalize our energy of the work to be done.”

Remember a time in your life when you experienced hope in the face of opposition or hopelessness.

- What were the circumstances?
- How did you feel?
- What or who helped you to feel hopeful?
- Who or what helped you to sustain your sense of hope?

There is a lot of evidence around us that things are changing, if only we see them.

- What signs of hope for justice, equality, and peace have you experienced or observed recently?
- What about this gives you hope?



*“When you are talking about a huge social transformation and the huge social struggle that precedes that transformation, there must be a huge shift in the collective imagination before any of that can take place. We must imagine the possibility of a more just world before the world may become more just.”*

—Martin Espada, 1957–present, poet, essayist, editor, translator, professor of English and father

## Imagining a World in 2030

(or current year +25)

(based on the work of Elise Boulding<sup>1</sup> and Linda Stout)

### RATIONALE

Visioning and naming what we are moving toward, rather than what we are working against, is one of the keys to movement building. It is important to take time to really create a collective vision if we are to be successful. Since it is hard to work for something we can't even see, our imaginations, dreams, and visions can guide and empower us. This exercise leads people through such a process.

### OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- identify their hopes for the future.
- discover how the imagination powerfully impacts our future.
- experience through visioning what our future could look like.

**TIME NEEDED** 6 hours (suggested as a full-day retreat)<sup>2</sup> or two sessions

### MATERIALS

- a pleasant-sounding bell
- art supplies: markers, crayons, scissors, glue sticks, etc.
- paper: drawing paper, poster board, and flip chart paper
- journaling tools
- copies of the questionnaire on page 47 and the time line on page 48.

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

#### Choosing Your Hopes for the World (1 hour)

I. Remind participants that we are in this Circle because we share the dream of living in a world that is diverse, inclusive, and free from violence. Ask them to articulate a specific social goal, in relation to this dream, that they would like to see realized 25

<sup>1</sup> Elise Boulding is one of the heroes in the struggle for a more compassionate and peaceful world. She is professor emerita of sociology, Dartmouth College. She was formerly director of the Institute for Behavioral Sciences at the University of Colorado and is the author of *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time* and *Culture of Peace: The Hidden Side of History*. She has worked extensively with the United Nations and is the past president of the International Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

<sup>2</sup> As we try to figure out how to better facilitate collective visioning in Circles, which is critical to our taking action, we are convinced that to be done well this exercise requires a full day. However, if a Circle cannot take a full-day retreat, this exercise can be completed in two sessions. We have also included a supplemental exercise, *Visioning into the Future in One Session*, page 56.

years from now. Suggest that they think in the most hopeful and optimistic way they can, drawing on the seeds of hope they have now that could grow into full blossom in the next 25 years. *Do not let yourself be confined by what you expect or fear will happen.*

2. Ask participants to write down one or two goals (which you will be using later in this exercise). If they have more than one or two, ask them to prioritize their goals. Ask them to be as concrete and as positive as possible.

**Please Note:** It will be important for you to guide people and offer alternatives if participants state their goals in the negative. For example: If someone writes “no repressive government,” offer an alternative framed in the positive, such as “an accountable, caring government that is truly representative and responsive to citizens needs.” If you get stuck reframing a negative statement into a positive one, Circle participants can help. And, if someone is unable to come up with a goal, they can adopt someone else’s that they hear during the sharing.

3. Invite participants to share their goal/s with the whole group. If they have more than one, ask them to share only their top two. A cofacilitator can write these goals down on flip chart paper and tape them on the walls around the room, for all to see.

4. Ask the group to reflect on what they notice about our collective hopes.

### **Exercising the Imagination** (10 minutes)

5. Remind participants of the rationale and intended outcomes of this exercise. You may want to share an overview of the ideas presented on pages 41 and 42 that describe the power of collective visioning.

Then give participants the following direction:

*In a few minutes we are going to enter the world of 25 years from now through the door of our imagination. First we need to get into the imagining mode. To do this, each of us will enter our personal memory world and pick one memory to re-experience. It should be a “good” memory, one you will enjoy reliving. You will want to be able to describe it in detail: the setting, the people involved, the smells, the sights, the sounds, and the feel of the place. The longer you explore the memory, the more you should try to see. The way you imagine (remember) the actual past experience will let you know how your imagination works. This is the same mental mode that will take you into the future, where you will imagine something which has not yet happened.*

Then allow the group to imagine, in silence, with their eyes closed. Let them know that you will ring a bell to indicate that it’s time to move into the future. Ask them to keep their eyes closed.

### **Imagining the World in 25 Years** (2-3 hours)

6. Give participants the following direction:

*Now you have passed through a hedge separating the present and the future. You are in the year 2030 (or add 25 years to whatever year you are currently in). Move around freely, observe carefully, ask questions of the people you meet. Make mental notes here of what you find.*

7. After ten minutes, ring the bell to indicate that it is time to come back. Allow participants to hold onto the imagined place where they are and to come back, slowly. The energy of the room will probably be soft and quiet, since people have spent the last 20 minutes in their imaginations.

8. Set out paper and art supplies. Ask participants to capture what they have seen and experienced in the future and to draw a picture or visually represent that world. Allow people plenty of time to do this. For those who are comfortable with art making, time is a gift. **Facilitators note:** Some people find it difficult to access their imagination. So ask them to trust that they are able to access their dreams and to find a way to capture what they can access.

9. Ask participants to form small groups of three. Guide them through the following directions, making sure they understand what they are to do at each step.

*For the purposes of this exercise, you are still in the future-present. If you wish to refer to the present year, do so in the past tense. Please share with each other your images of the future. Detailed*



answers to these kinds of questions are useful as you account for what you are seeing—locally, moving as far out as you can in terms of regions, and the planet as a whole.

What kind of world do you see out there?

What structures must exist in this world to account for what you are seeing?

How is family life organized?

What is the economic and political system?

How is education organized?

How does civic and cultural life maintain itself?

What makes this society tick?

Time will be a limiting factor here, so begin with those aspects that most interest your small group. You can add others later, even after the session is over. Take turns helping each other analyze the structure of the world you have each seen individually.

**10.** After small groups have had a chance to share their visions they will discuss how to build a visual representation of the world, together. They should be encouraged to be in their most creative selves to do this. They should draw on the conversations they have had. Remind them to think about all of their discussions and their goals in step 1. Themes are likely to emerge—to “build” their world around. These themes will provide the inspiration for the world they build and represent visually.

**11.** When each group feels ready, ask them to create a picture or diagram representing their vision of the world, collectively, on poster board. Provide plenty of time for each small group to deeply engage with each other, their art materials, and the weaving together of their visions. This can easily take 45 minutes.

**12.** After each group is finished, they will be invited to share their future world with the other participants.

**13.** Spend a few minutes in reflection once all of the groups have shared.

What are the similarities, connections, and themes that arise out of the collective sharing?

Are there opposing ideas?

How do you feel seeing and hearing about these worlds?

What have you learned?

### **Remembering History** (1 1/2 hours)

**14.** Ask participants to move back into their small groups of three. Give the following directions:

*Close your eyes. Take a few breaths to center your self. Find the collective breath of your group as you breathe. You may want to join hands with each other. You are all standing together in the year 2030 (or whatever future year people have been in), looking back. How did this future come about? Remember/ imagine some key events. Include the major benchmarks in the world as it changed. What happened just last year (in 2029)? Five years ago (in 2025)? Ten years ago (in 2020)? Fifteen years ago (in 2015)? Twenty years ago (in 2010)? And what happened twenty-five years ago (in 2005)?*

**Please Note:** Pause between each of the questions so people really do have a chance to see and remember/imagine.

**15.** Pass out a time line to each group and ask someone to be the record keeper. As a group, they will describe the events, as they are *looking back and seeing* them. The record keeper should capture all of the ideas generated by the group, as in a brainstorm. However, unlike a brainstorm, people are encouraged to dialogue with each other in the process. If a group is having a difficult time seeing back to a certain year, they can skip it and move on. Provide ample time to do this, sometimes up to an hour.

**16.** Ask each group to share its time line with the whole Circle in order to develop a common remembered history. Facilitator may want to collect these or capture the information on flip charts.

## Action in the Present (1 hour)

**17.** Think about what you are inspired to do right now—this year, to help bring about the future world you have experienced.

**18.** Pass out the questionnaire and allow participants to fill it out. Facilitators may want to meet with the individual Circle participants to help them think through the questions. This entire exercise is meant to be practical, so help people think through what they can really do.

**19.** When everyone is finished with their individual questionnaire ask folks to share. As the Circle participants share their individual actions, ask the group to listen for opportunities to work together. Let the Circle participants know that, as the Circle moves into its final phase, *Action for Deep and Lasting Change*, it will draw on this experience. The Circle will need to collectively hold on to what participants have co-created. Suggest as well, that the Circle (or several members of it) might want to move towards collective action, based on their work! If so, think about *Moving Circles to Collective Action*, page 76.

## NOTES TO FACILITATORS

We have not actually “tested” this expanded exercise within the Circles yet. However, Elise Boulding and Linda Stout have used this kind of exercise many times with many groups. But we had heard from the Circle facilitators, who believed in the power of collective visioning, that the previous visioning exercise had not always gone as well as they had hoped. As the Curriculum Committee explored the reason for this, we recognized that Circles try to do visioning in a three hour session. And many of us had tasted the potential power of visioning in other groups that we were in, but seldom was the time provided to really go deep. Therefore, we strongly recommend taking a daylong retreat to do this work. (For some Circles, this may not be possible, so we have strengthened our original visioning exercise, *Visioning into the Future in One Session*, page. 56.)

It is important that we hear from you about how this exercise works. Your feedback is critical to our ongoing development of this program. Contact us at [info@spiritinaction.net](mailto:info@spiritinaction.net).



## QUESTIONNAIRE

Think about where you can act: in your family, in your neighborhood, in your community, in your work place, in organizations you are involved in, where you shop, etc.

***Where can I act?*** List all of the possibilities.

***Where have I decided to act?***

What concrete and specific goals will you set for yourself that you could achieve in the coming months? Begin to flesh out a specific project base on your answers to the below:

***My goals for the next few months:***

***Who will be my allies and supporters?***

***How do I begin to “live” my vision in the present moment?***

**T I M E L I N E**

**2 0 3 0**  
**current year +25**

**2 0 2 9**  
**current year +24**

**2 0 2 5**  
**current year +20**

**2 0 2 0**  
**current year +15**

**2 0 1 5**  
**current year +10**

**2 0 1 0**  
**current year +5**

**2 0 0 5**  
**current year**



*“Shared visions emerge from personal visions. This is how they derive their energy and how they foster commitment.”*

—Peter Senge, 1947 to present, author of *The Fifth Discipline*

## The Body of Achievement

(based on the work of Class Action<sup>1</sup>)

### RATIONALE

It can be easier for people to focus on collective visioning when they have done their own personal vision work. This exercise allows participants to develop a personal vision, and as a result, to develop an understanding of the power of visioning. It is an exercise that might be selected for a Circle in preparation for their collective visioning.

### OUTCOME

Participants will develop a personal goal and vision, articulate it to others, and figure out first steps needed to achieve/move toward their goal.

**TIME NEEDED:** 2+ hours

### MATERIALS

- paper
- art supplies: markers, colored pencils, magazines for images, scissors, glue sticks, etc.
- journaling tools
- copies of the *Interview Questions*, page 52
- blank cards (a piece of cardstock folded in half will do)

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

#### 1. Setting the Context for a Guided Meditation

In order to get Circle participants ready for the guided meditation, suggest that people sit comfortably in a circle. Let people know the purpose of this activity and why you chose to do it at this time. Answer any questions Circle participants might have.

Here’s what a facilitator from Berkeley found: *“As I started the personal visioning exercise, I talked about my belief that we must learn how to create a shared vision for how we want the world to be, and my concern that so many people tend to think visioning is a waste of time and not ‘serious business.’ I asked that people embrace this exercise as a chance to try visioning and explore how it can be a powerful tool for both personal*

<sup>1</sup> Class Action, founded by Jennifer Ladd, raises consciousness about the issues of class and money, and their impact on our individual lives, relationships, organizations, institutions, and culture, while supporting the development of cross-class alliance building and the movement of resources to where they are most needed. See [www.classactionnet.org](http://www.classactionnet.org).



and social change. I have now heard from everyone who participated, and they are all acting on their personal goal and are excited to create and then act on a shared vision for a more just world.”

## 2. Choosing the Goal

a. Give people the following instructions:

*Take a moment to think about a personal goal or desire you have for yourself that you can concretely articulate for yourself. Choose one goal you know you want to achieve and when you hope to achieve it by (as far as you can tell).*

Be sure to give people enough time to come up with a goal that is meaningful to them.

b. Go around the Circle and have people share their goal, and when they would like to achieve it. If a participant presents several goals because they are having a hard time choosing one, suggest that they go for the goal that has the most emotion for them.

## 3. Guided Meditation: Getting into the Body of Achievement

As you talk people through the guided vision, use your voice to develop a slow and meditative rhythm, pausing between sentences. Especially pause after questions and instructions. Guided visioning requires that you give plenty of time for reflection and space for contemplation. Do not feel as though you need to rush this process.

*Close your eyes or look down with soft focus.*

*Take three breaths (together with others).*

*Be aware of your body, the weight of it, the fullness of it, the edges of it.*

*Now think of the goal you want to achieve and imagine the achievement of the goal seeping into your body starting at the head, or growing up from the earth into your legs. Imagine that you have achieved it.*

*How does your body feel? Muscles, nervous system, posture, eyes?*

*How does your inner landscape feel? Clean, clear, fragrant, scratchy?*

*Has anything changed in your relationship with friends, with a partner, family, work?*

*How do they see you? How do you see them?*

*How do you feel when you get up in the morning?*

*How do you feel when you eat, move, deal with conflict?*

*How do you feel when you go to bed at night?*

*With your eyes still closed, stand up.*

*Feel your posture, your stance, experiment with bending and moving in your body of achievement.*

*Open your eyes softly, and still keeping to your self begin to walk around the room in the body that has achieved this goal.*

*Keep to yourself at first, move around in a way that reflects your achievement.*

*Try moving quickly, try moving slowly.*

*Now let your self be aware of others.*

*Allow sounds to accompany your movements.*

*Allow words to come out of you in your body of achievement.*

*Now greet people in the body of achievement. Notice how that feels.*

*Notice smells, sounds, the feel of things, where you do and don't have tension in your body.*

*Leave the room: you can go to the bathroom, walk around the rest of the building ... but stay centered in your body of achievement so you can experience your self outside of the walls of this room.*

Call people back into the meeting space.

*As you come to our meeting space, return to a still position, and close your eyes again.*

*Find a place on your body that can be an anchor for this experience.*

*Touch that spot if you wish and know that anytime you wish to reactivate this feeling, this body of achievement, you can touch or tune into this spot and it will be a pathway back to your experience now.*

*When you are ready, you may open your eyes.*

*Stay in your body of achievement.*

4. Provide art supplies so that participants can draw or collage what it feels like to be in their body of achievement. Ask people to touch base with the physical spot on/in their body that they identified in the meditation. Provide enough time for people to capture their experience.

#### 5. The Interview

a. Ask people to find a partner. Pass out the Interview Questions. Explain that each person will take turns being the interviewer/scribe and interviewee. These questions are to be answered from the future time where you have accomplished your goal. You will be looking back, reflecting on how you succeeded. The interviewer writes down the answers of the person they are interviewing. Everyone will have about ten minutes of interviewing time. If there is not time to answer all of the questions, ask the interviewee to mark which questions they most want to answer. Let the first interviewer know when their time is almost up.

b. After the first round, have everyone stand up, shake out, and touch the spot on their body so they reconnect with their “body of achievement.” Then allow another ten minutes for the second round of interviews.

6. When everyone is finished, pass out a card to each person—something that they can take home to serve as a reminder. Ask everyone to write a letter to themselves saying what they intend to do or to write an affirmation or to create an image. Encourage them to reference the place on their body where they have anchored their visioning experience as well as to identify one small step they will take to move toward their goal.

7. To end, reconvene in a Circle. Go around and ask each person what they achieved—from a future perspective. Ask each person to take a moment and remember:

What was the first thing you did after this session?

Who was the first person you turned to for support on your journey?

(These questions above are important, so make sure there is time at the end to ask them. It helps people take their first step toward their goal.)

Give each person a round of applause. If there is time, people might want to share their cards with the group.

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What did you learn about yourself from this process?

What did you learn about visioning?

What would you like to remember from this exercise?



## Dreaming to Dance Again

by Linda Stout, Spirit in Action founder and director

*I participated in the exercise, The Body of Achievement, led by my friend Jenny. My goal was to dance again. I had not danced in many years due to multiple sclerosis. The dream of dancing brought tears to my eyes when I talked about it. My first step then was to go buy a pair of dance shoes. I did, the very the next day (actually I bought two pairs). And then I hired a coach within the first week. A few months later I danced at my wedding ceremony.*

Feel free to choose those which are most relevant.

**Interviewee:**

**Interviewer:**

The time is in the future, where you have accomplished your personal goal. We are looking back and reflecting on how you accomplished it.

*So what's up, what have you achieved?*

*How did you do it?*

*Who helped you? How? When?*

*What were the barriers and how did you overcome them?*

*How did you maintain the will that you started out with?*

*What has changed for you since you achieved this goal?*

*What are the benefits of those changes?*

*Did you have to give up anything to achieve your goal?*

*What new challenges and opportunities are opening up for you as a result of reaching your goal?*

*Would you have done anything differently?*

*What did you learn about yourself in the process?*

*What advice might you give others working to reach their goals?*

*Is there anything else you would like to tell us?*



*“People reported feeling really blown away by this exercise. It was like a clearing out of gunk to enable us to go into visioning.”*

—a Philadelphia Women’s Circle facilitator

## Speaking Our Heart’s Truth (based on the work of Joanna Macy<sup>1</sup>)

### RATIONALE

It is sometimes challenging for people to vision the future when our current reality fills us with hopelessness and despair. This exercise allows people to surface and name hopelessness—their despair, fear, anger, needs, and grief—in a contained space in order to create healing. Use this exercise if your group is struggling with hopelessness and despair; sometimes it helps to acknowledge where people are, before they are able and willing to create a vision of the future.

### OUTCOMES

Circle participants will:

- acknowledge and speak to the despair and pain they feel about what is happening in the world.
- reframe their hopelessness as evidence of their interconnectedness in the web of life, and hence of their power to take part in its healing

**TIME NEEDED:** 2 1/2 hours

### MATERIALS

- CD of drum music
- ritual items (candle, stone, dry leaves, stick, empty bowl)
- an open space that people can move in and out of marked by tape
- a candle
- a song or chant for the opening
- an uplifting song or dance music for closing

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. Prepare the room, clearing everything out of the center. Pillows and chairs can be set around the edge for people to sit on. Divide the space into four sections using tape or rope. Each quadrant (and the object placed inside it) represents a different emotion. Joanna Macy uses the following:

- Quadrant 1: a **stone** for **fear**
- Quadrant 2: **dry leaves** for **sorrow, grief**
- Quadrant 3: a **stick** for **anger**
- Quadrant 4: an **empty bowl** for **need, emptiness**



<sup>1</sup> See Macy, Joanna and Molly Young Brown, *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* (New Society Publishers, 1998).



2. As people enter, ask them to be silent and sit on the perimeter, in a circle. You might want to have a lit candle in the center for this period. Have a drum beat in background—a drum beat that starts as heartbeat, very small and escalates as people enter. It can become stronger and louder to end.
3. Provide the following invitation in order to begin.

*Today, we are going to allow ourselves to look at what is happening in our world—what our greatest fears are—our sadness and despair, our anger and confusion.*

*In each quadrant of the inner circle there is a symbolic object: a stone, dead leaves, a thick stick, and an empty bowl.*

The facilitator enters each quadrant, picks up each object and explains its meaning.

*This **stone** is for **fear**. It's how our heart feels when we're afraid: tight, contracted, hard. In this quadrant we can speak our fear.*

*These **dry leaves** represent our **sorrow**, our **grief**. There is great sadness within us for what we see happening to our world, our lives, and for what is passing from us.*

*This **stick** is for our **anger**. For there is anger and outrage in us that needs to be spoken for clarity of mind and purpose. This stick is not for hitting with or waving around, but for grasping hard with both hands—it's strong enough for that.*

*And in this fourth quadrant, the **empty bowl** stands for our sense of **deprivation** and **need**, our hunger for what's missing, our **emptiness**.*

*You may wonder where hope is. The very ground of this circle is hope. If we didn't have hope, we wouldn't be here.*

*We will begin with a moment of silence (or chant or song, etc.) because this becomes holy ground, for nothing makes a place more holy than truth telling. Then we will step in one at a time, spontaneously. We will take a symbol in our hands and speak, or move from one to another. You do not have to come in, there is no pressure to enter. Even if you stay on the periphery, you will find that, as each person enters the circle, you are in there with them.*

*Since we are not used to talking like this in public, we need the support of the whole group. After each person has spoken, let us all say "we hear you." Your agreement or approval is not needed—just your hearing and respect. And let us pause for three breaths in silence between speaking.*

*We will speak briefly; in brevity words are powerful.*

4. Begin with silence or the song or chant you have selected. It may take people a while to get into the exercise. Give it time; once people get going, this takes on a life of its own.

Allow the process that you have set up the time it needs. However, if someone is taking up lots of space with their despair you may need to remind folks to speak briefly and allow time for all voices to be heard.

Trust yourself to sense when it is time to draw the ritual to a close. Read clues in people's body language and in the energy of the group. As you prepare to close, tell people, so that those who have been holding back and waiting to speak can do so. You could say:

*The truth telling will continue in our lives, but this chapter of it will soon draw to a close. Let those who have been waiting to come in, enter now and speak.*

5. To close, honor the truth that everyone has spoken and the respectful support each has given. Point out the deeper import of each quadrant. Each symbolic object is like a coin with two sides; Picking up one object after another:

*Please notice what you have been expressing and hearing.*

*In hearing fear, you also heard the trust it takes to speak it.*

*The sorrow spoken over the dead leaves was in equal measure love. We only mourn what we deeply care for.*

*And the anger we heard, what does it spring from but passion for justice?*

*The empty bowl is to be honored, too. To be empty means there is space for new.*

This can be a powerful experience for participants so closing the Circle session is critical. It can make people more depressed if you do not leave time for celebration. We suggest closing with a life-affirming song or by dancing together, at the very end.

### **NOTES TO FACILITATORS**

In Circles of Change, we connect with spirit and with each other so that we can effect meaningful change in the world. There are times when we take a leap of faith and allow what we have worked so hard to co-create to come forward and we take a step back. This exercise is one of those times. Trust your self, your cofacilitator, and the container you have co-created with participants in your Circle. Allow the magic to happen.



*“Oh, the power of the creative and energized few taking on a vision for what the world could hold for us ... I truly feel hopeful! We touched on the unseen powers of change.*

—a Louisville facilitator

## Visioning into the Future in One Session<sup>1</sup>

### RATIONALE

This visioning exercise is suggested for Circles that need to accomplish the core of their visioning in one session.

### OUTCOMES

Circle participants will:

- experience through visioning what our future could look like.
- clarify what can be done in the present (and near future) to manifest the future we desire.

**TIME NEEDED:** 2+ hours

### MATERIALS

- art materials and journaling tools (for people to capture their visions)
- flip chart paper and markers

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. Set the context for collective visioning with the group. Imagining what is possible for our future can be powerful—we cannot create what we cannot imagine. Encourage participants to hold their questions and ask them to trust you as you lead them through an experience that can be discussed afterward if needed.

2. Ask participants to write down their age and today’s date, and then to add 25 years to both. Ask them to write down the names and ages of the children closest to them. Finally give them a moment to write down a few of the values most important to them and/or two or three of their desires for society/the world. Ask them to do this rather quickly, letting them know that the exercise will bring them into a deeper exploration of each.

#### Stepping into the Future

3. Lead participants through a simple guided meditation. Invite them to be comfortable, to close their eyes, and to take a few deep breaths. As you talk people through the guided vision, use your voice to develop a rhythm, pausing between sentences. Especially pause after questions and instructions. Here is a sample script for you to use:

*Feel your self being carried into the future. One year. Three years. Five years. Ten years from now. Twenty years from now. You are being carried 25 years into the future.*

*It is the year (add 25 to the current year).*

*In this year, imagine that society is built around the values you hold dear, that your desires for society are met.*

*Imagine that you wake up in that future.*

*What do you see?*

<sup>1</sup> Based on an exercise by Linda Stout in *Bridging the Class Divide and Other Lessons for Grassroots Organizing* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1996).

*What are you doing?*  
*What are the children in your life doing?*  
*What kind of dwelling do you live in?*  
*Who do you live with?*  
*You go outside, what do you see?*  
*What is growing from the earth?*  
*You go out into your neighborhood, who do you see?*  
*What are they doing?*  
*What kinds of dwellings and buildings are there on the street?*  
*You leave your neighborhood and go into the wider community. How do you travel?*  
*As you are moving around in the wider community, what kinds of institutions do you see?*  
*What institutions and groups seem to be most important in the community?*  
*You meet up with one of the children from your list who is now grown.*  
*What is this now adult child doing?*  
*You talk and realize that you want to find out about what is happening in the community and the worlds beyond. How do you get this news?*  
*What is the news about?*  
*Where else do you go?*  
*What do you see?*  
*Who do you talk to?*  
*What do you learn?*  
*It is time to return.*  
*Once you've returned, and when you are ready, you may open your eyes.*

4. Allow the group to sit in silence during the transition.

### **Making the Vision Concrete**

5. Instruct participants, when they are ready, to take about 15 minutes, using whatever art supplies and journaling tools are available, to capture in a picture, in a symbol, or in words the future that they saw. Remind them that this step in the process is not about creating great art, but about finding ways to capture their visions so we can talk about them.

### **Sharing the Visions**

6. Ask participants to find a partner. They will have two tasks for their sharing: 1.) Talk for a couple of minutes about their vision picture, symbol, or words; and 2.) Give an example or two of how something in their present life that inspires them to have this vision and/or believe it is possible.
7. As everyone finishes sharing their visions, hang them up around the room.

### **Brainstorming the Future**

8. Invite participants to share all their ideas (without questioning or judgment at this point) about how the future is different from today. Remind them to focus on the positive realization of their visions. Capture what they say on flip chart paper—as a list or as a map, clustering ideas that are similar to one another.

### **Brainstorming the Seeds of Hope**

9. Invite participants to share all their ideas (without questioning or judgment) about what is happening in our society today that will help make our visions of society a reality. You can capture these on the same flip chart paper, using a marker of another color.



## Individual Reflection

**10.** Provide about ten minutes for participants to reflect individually. They can use the art materials and journaling tools to think about the following:

What is needed to make these visions a reality?

How am I already working to make these visions a reality?

What do I want to be doing tomorrow to make the visions a reality? Next year? In five years? Ten years? Twenty years?

What help do I need to do this work?

## Vision Circle

**11.** End by bringing everyone back together in the Circle, inviting participants to share, and making sure everyone who wants to share, has a chance to. (For many groups, this conversation can go on for quite a while, so being aware of time at this point is important.) You may want to focus their sharing with guidelines like these:

Share what you believe and feel is most important to making these visions a reality.

Share one gift that you bring to making these visions a reality.

Share what you will be doing tomorrow to make the vision a reality.

If needed, make any requests for help. (Know that your request will not be answered right away in the Circle—all will listen in silence—but replies may come to you from folks later on.)

## NOTES FOR FACILITATORS

Not every facilitator feels comfortable or confident leading guided visioning exercises. One of the Curriculum Committee members noted her own reluctance to lead visioning and discovered that she could learn by watching others and even made it a part of the Curriculum Committee's process—envisioning this facilitators' guide.

## V A R I A T I O N S

Not all groups are comfortable with visioning, as we noted earlier in this section. One variation on the theme is to vision one, three, five or ten years into the future, instead of 25 years into the future. For some people, looking beyond ten years is too daunting to consider, given the current state of the planet.

Several Circles created murals after this visioning exercise and really loved the experience.

In one of the Circles in San Francisco: *"We experienced some hopelessness and fear that our vision wasn't possible. So we created a mural of all the 'seeds' that are currently growing in our world that will help to make our vision possible. For example, we named programs, individuals, groups, movements, and institutions that we believe are creating the change we want to see in the world. It was incredible all the ideas we had, and we all learned a lot about different projects that are happening. It gave us a lot of hope!"*

In the Berkeley Circle: *"We wanted to remember our vision for the world in 20 years so we created a mural with images from magazines that would remind us of our dreams. Everyone started creating their own part of the mural and then we started to connect all the areas with the parts of our visions that were clearly shared by the whole collective."*

*A Core Strategy for Building a Broad-based Movement*

# *Action for Deep and Lasting Change*

Action for deep and lasting change exists along a continuum that includes mass demonstrations as well as supporting the psychological, physical, and spiritual health of activists. Circles serve as a space for doing the less dramatic forms of activism, such as self-care, trust and relationship building, and the examination of strategy and development of new change tools.

**A**ction for deep and lasting change exists along a continuum that includes mass demonstrations as well as supporting the psychological, physical, and spiritual health of activists. This continuum flows not from greater to lesser, but rather in repeating cycles, and requires work on levels from the personal to the group and to the wider society and its institutions. Many approaches to social change emphasize the societal or systemic actions for change. Circles serve as a space for doing the less dramatic forms of activism, such as self-care, trust and relationship building, and the examination of strategy and development of new change tools. By focusing on these areas, we propose working to balance where our attention is placed.

**The type of action that Circles seek to support is grounded in developing a relationship with the self. In other words, activists are supported to engage in the inner psychological and spiritual work that leads to health and wholeness.** Activism calls those concerned with justice to focus on external actions and the outer world. Much of the work brings us into contact with suffering. At its extreme, activists are forced into a constant cycle of work, with little time for reflection or individual development. Focusing on “getting the work done” allows little time for spiritual, physical, and emotional renewal. Circles create an opening and a process for activists to support each other to prevent burnout and move toward health and wholeness. However, there is a difference between the work that can be done in Circles and personal therapy. Circle participants also need to do their personal work outside of the Circle. Circles are intended to provide a respite from the frenzy of action, allowing participants to reflect more deeply on their personal values and how they live these values in the world. This reflection encourages new understanding about action. In addition, developing our inner strength and authenticity allows us to engage with those of different values, backgrounds, and beliefs, and is a foundation for the collaborative action needed for broad-based change.

**The foundation of effective action is supportive and collaborative relationships with others.** Generating hope about the possibilities of social change motivates our desire to build community. Circles offer an opportunity to generate that hope, build community, and deepen relationships, which doesn’t often come from a more goal-oriented gathering. Circles create a space for dialogue on issues of great importance to those working, sometimes in different ways, for a better world. While Circle participants generally share a common set of values and carry a similar desire for a peaceful, just, and sustainable world, our strategies on how to live these values and achieve our desires often differ as a result of our backgrounds. One source of conflict for passionate and committed activists centers on the use of particular strategies and tactics. The relationships that can develop in Circles allow for a greater ability to listen to diverse perspectives. As participants share their stories and perspectives in Circles a greater understanding of why certain positions are taken and certain strategies are selected can emerge. As a group thinks about actions, some see mass action and rallies as most important, while others value more relationship-oriented organizing. Still others wonder how to develop a nonviolent plan of action in the face of the violence so many experience from our current system. Therefore reflection and dialogue are critical and our relationships to each other are essential.

**To be counted as effective, Circle participants must share what they learn in the Circle, outside of the Circle.** Inevitably, facilitators and participants bring what we learn in Circles to improving decision making in other groups, introducing a language of social change that includes words such as love, and inspiring people to believe positive change is possible. This is the action that springs from Circles—supporting one end of the action continuum to strengthen a whole spectrum of action needed for social and political transformation.



## Reinstating Local Bus Routes

by Linda Stout, Spirit in Action founder and director

*Our Circle in Amherst, Massachusetts, was made up of low-income women, most of whom used the public bus system to get to our meetings. They came to the meeting one day upset because the bus system was cutting back on its routes and stops. Not only would the women no longer be able to come to the meetings, many were going to be affected deeply by the cuts—which would restrict their ability to get to medical appointments and grocery stores. We decided that our action plan would focus on convincing the town to keep the bus routes. The group produced an educational flyer, which called for the town to reinstate full funding for the bus system. We gave them out on the buses as well as in public places where people gathered. We talked to folks who didn't need the bus, to garner allies in support. The women and their many allies met at the town hall for a hearing. All of the routes were reinstated. This gave the women a lot of hope and we moved into the visioning exercise. We began to dream of other things we could work on together to change things that affected our lives.*





## Sharing Our Stories

### *Answering the Call—Agents of Change*

*For directions on how to use these questions in your Circle, see Sharing Our Stories, page 10.*

Injustice is violence. Unjust working conditions are violence. Poverty is violence. Dumping toxins into our rivers is violence. Lack of access to education is violence. Discrimination based on race, gender, class, ethnicity, or sexual orientation is violence. We have the power to overcome the violence of injustice in all its forms. Indeed, we are called to join a long history of visionary, powerful, and courageous people who have worked against great odds for equal rights, fair labor, peace, liberation, and justice in all forms. We are called to be agents of change.

Recall two or three of the most positive changes for justice and equality you have witnessed in your lifetime.

- What were the circumstances?
- How did it change your life?
- What were the conditions that contributed to making that change possible?

Remember a time when you were part of creating positive change.

- What was happening?
- What was your role?
- What gave you the courage to act, when you sensed something was wrong?
- What are the unique gifts that you bring to making the world a better place?

Think about all the events and trends in the world today and the current response of social change organizations.

- What do you see as most positive?
- What is having the greatest capacity to effect sustained and positive change in the world as we know it?
- What should we be doing more of?
- What should we be doing differently?





*“It is important to step up and take the reins. For me, it is just being more confident and being out there. We have these tools and we have great energy. We need to move forward in community, in family, in relationships.”*

—a Louisville Circle participant

## Applying Circle Learnings

### RATIONALE

Circle participants who have brought tools they learned in the Circles of Change to the organizations and groups that they work with have reported the benefits that these organizations and groups experienced. Some have reported back that it can be challenging as well. This exercise supports participants to experiment with bringing Circle tools into other places. It is an exercise that can be introduced early on in the life of a Circle and periodically repeated.

### OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- reflect on what they have learned in Circles.
- identify steps toward experimenting with a tool outside the Circle and receive support from fellow participants for their experimentation.

### TIME NEEDED

- 30 minutes (the first time it is introduced)
- 10 minutes (to follow-up on in the next session)
- 10 minutes (each time it is used again)

### MATERIALS

- Copies of the worksheet, *Applying Circle Learnings*, page 64

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

Think about where to introduce this exercise in the life of your Circle. It can follow any of the core exercises early on in your Circle sessions. It will take about 30 minutes the first time it is introduced and you will need to set aside another ten minutes at the beginning of the next session, to provide the follow-up and support.

1. Begin by reconnecting participants to one of the goals of Circles of Change—to share the tools they experience in the Circle, outside of the Circle—a key strategy of the Circle’s action component. Discuss the benefits and challenges experienced by other Circle participants; you can read the opening quote or the benefits (see the bottom of page 3).

Then pass out the worksheet, *Applying Circle Learnings*, and ask participants to respond to the questions.

2. When participants have filled in the worksheet, ask them to find a partner. Together they will share their next steps and ask their partner (and the larger Circle, if necessary) for the support they will need. These pairs will follow-up with each other in

the next session. (If you choose to repeat this exercise throughout the life of your Circle, these partners can be encouraged to provide ongoing support to each other.)

### Follow-up in the next session

3. We've seen the follow-up work best if it's part of your Circle's Check-In. Give participants a chance to talk with their partner from the week before. (The first time Circle participants experiment with applying Circle tools, you may want everyone to share their experiences in the whole group.)

As you move through the Circle sessions, allow for two or three more times for participants to complete the worksheet and check-in with their partner, both before and after they apply the tools in other contexts. Encourage people to feel free to do this kind of reflection on their own, even when it cannot be built into the Circle session. You may want to keep copies of the worksheet on hand so they are available as participants need them.

### NOTES TO FACILITATORS

Some participants can become very focused on doing things "right." When their experiments are not fully successful they can become self-critical or write off the exercise. You may need to remind them that the goal of the exercise is the experimentation. If someone has experimented, they have achieved a degree of success already. We will all make use of the learnings, that come from the challenges, as guidelines for our own future applications.

## Walking in Silent Protest

by Megan Voorhees, Berkeley Circle facilitator and member of the Curriculum Committee

*Right before the U.S. decided to invade Iraq in 2003, I was watching part of the documentary A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict (see Resources for Supporting Circles Of Change, page 112), which shows real footage from different successful nonviolent actions. I watched both the clips of the lunch-counter strikes during the civil rights movement in the U.S., and Gandhi's infamous "salt marsh." I was struck that both demonstrations were held in silence, which was very different than the loud, angry marches that were happening in protest of our invasion of Iraq. I decided to organize a group of friends to walk in silence at the next march in San Francisco. I invited 20 people, but the idea spread, and we had over 100 people join us.*

*It was incredibly powerful to walk in silence. We had several hours to really reflect on why we were marching and to really feel our sorrow, anger, and frustration. We realized that walking in silence was also an excellent organizing strategy: it made it easier for our leaders to change course and to communicate with the entire crowd. We all had energy to work together after the march (usually after marches, most of us were exhausted), and we felt more connected to each other. It was wonderful to march with purpose instead of in anger.*



# Applying Circle Learnings

## Step 1: Reflect

What has been confirmed for me in the Circle so far? What did I learn?

What is the range of possibilities of how I might integrate and apply these confirmations and learnings into my work? My activism? My spiritual/religious life? My personal life?

1. What (tools, practices, stories) can I take into my life, this week, to apply what I am learning?

2. Where is one place I can begin?

3. What are my concerns? Challenges? Obstacles? Saboteurs?



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## Step 2: Decide what to do

Decide what you will do in the next week and share it with a partner (or in your Circle).

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## Step 3: Reflect

Check-in with your partner (or with your Circle) when you reconvene.  
How did it go? What worked?

Do I need support? Do I need the Circle to help me strategize for future changes?



*“The civil rights movement won campaign after campaign without converting their arch enemies to racial equality. The U.S. pulled its troops out of Vietnam even though our war-mongering power-holders still wanted to bomb the country back to the stone-age. Gay rights activists win again and again even though pulpits continue to reverberate with homophobic thunder. This is why it is both incorrect and a waste of energy for activists to focus so much attention on their opponents.”*

—George Lakey, director of Training for Change

## Spectrum of Allies

*(developed by Martin Oppenheimer and George Lakey of Training for Change<sup>1</sup>)*

### RATIONALE

This exercise allows participants to think strategically about how to engage their allies, instead of expending a lot of unnecessary time and energy thinking about those who are diametrically opposed to a particular issue. It is also an opportunity for the Circle to explore strategies to mobilize the community on any particular issue or to implement Circle tools in a particular organization.



### OUTCOMES

Circle participants will:

- identify groups and people most open to working in partnership for social and political transformation.
- identify the best strategies and messages for reaching these groups and people.

**TIME NEEDED:** 1 hour

### MATERIALS

- flip chart and markers

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. On one side of a flip chart paper draw a point—to describe that in most social change situations there is a struggle between those who want the change and those who don't. Draw a point on the opposite side of the paper—to represent those who don't. Explain that most communities (or towns, or states) include a range of groups that can be put on a spectrum—from closest to the point of view of the advocates to farthest away. Connect the points by drawing a horizontal line to represent this spectrum.

2. Next draw half of a pie with wedges, like the drawing below. Ask for an example of an issue people

<sup>1</sup> See [www.trainingforchange.org](http://www.trainingforchange.org) for more information on the organization and other great tools for social change.

in the Circle are working on and a demand the advocates might have. For example, people might be working for free public transport. Ask who in the community (or in state) might be inclined to be most supportive. Who might be least supportive? Who might be in the middle? Offer some examples of groups that could be placed in the spectrum: unions, advocacy groups for the poor, the Chamber of Commerce. Encourage discussion among participants to figure out where these groups might stand as allies. As they identify groups and their locations on the spectrum, fill in the “pie.”

3. Now give the Circle the good news: in most social change campaigns it's not necessary to win the opponents over to your point of view, even if the opponent is the power-holder. It is only necessary to move each of the pie wedges one step in your direction. Make sure that's clear. Then complicate the picture slightly: sometimes polarization happens and the wedges closest to the opponent move away and toward the opponent. You can still win, if enough of society takes a step in your direction.

Let the group digest the good news—as we know, most of us believe that we need to win everyone to our side. This has led to despair in organizing. We also believe that all of our attention needs to focus on our opponents, at the opposite end of the spectrum.

4. Have people draw the *Spectrum of Allies* pie on a piece of paper. Invite participants to gather in small groups based on the campaign/issue/movement they are working on or are interested in working on. As a group, have them fill in their *allies* on the pie. Invite the groups to brainstorm messages and tactics that might effectively communicate with the organizations and people in each of the wedges—thinking specifically about the allies that they want most to win. Facilitators should roam among the small groups to answer questions that might come up.

5. Capture the learnings in the whole Circle. Emphasize that it's a huge win if you can get a group that was slightly hostile to move into neutrality. It's a huge win if you can get the group/wedge next to your end of the spectrum to move into activism with you. It's usually not necessary to move the opponents a wedge toward you in order to win, although it can hasten the victory.

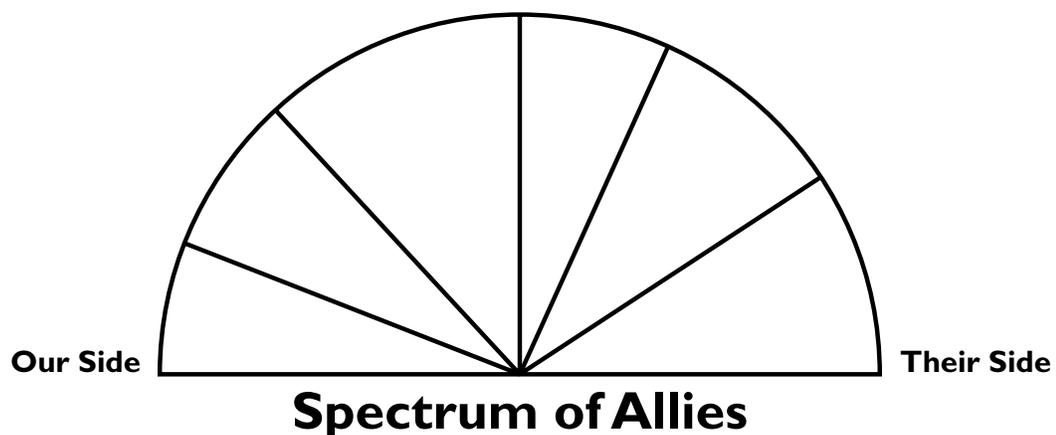


### REFLECTION QUESTION

What have you learned from this way of thinking about our allies?

### NOTES TO FACILITATORS

At Spirit in Action, we've used this tool to think about what kinds of people would be most interested in and best matches for the Circles program. As a facilitator, you may want to use this tool to think about what groups of people you want to recruit into your Circle. This tool is also obvious choice for planning for action. You may find it useful to introduce it as an extension to *Moving Circles to Collective Action*, page 76.



# What Do You Want?

## *Creating Change through Our Connections*

### **RATIONALE**

This exercise is a fun way to remind people of the importance of asking others for help. It can be used as a energizer or team-builder anytime in the curriculum and would be perfect as an introduction to a session focusing on taking action.

### **OUTCOME**

Circle participants will remember the importance of communicating to others what they need.

**TIME NEEDED:** 15 minutes

### **STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS**

1. Ask each participant to think of something that they need or want in their life right now. This could be a job, an idea for a book to read, an idea for how to address a social issue, or even a material object.
2. Once participants know what they are going to ask for, invite them to walk around and talk with at least eight other people in the room, sharing with each what it is they are looking for. Each person they encounter has to come up with one idea for how to find what is needed. Ask participants to move around and share ideas as quickly as they can, as if they were playing “hot potato.”
3. When everyone is done, encourage each participant to write down all the ideas that they received. Then ask participants to share the best ideas with the other members of the Circle.



*“When we did this exercise with people through the Piedmont Peace Project, several of the women poured out stories of being ‘iced out’ by their husbands and children for their activism. It was a welcome relief for them to say some of these things out loud and then find their own internal resources for dealing with them.”*

—Cathy Hoffman, Boston Circle facilitator and member of the Curriculum Committee

## Facing the Challenges

(based on the work of the Piedmont Peace Project<sup>1</sup>)

### RATIONALE

Identifying and creating ways to ground ourselves strengthens us and our work. It enables us to deal more effectively and compassionately with outsiders who challenge us and with those close to us as well. The more we understand “what we are up against,” the more we can sustain ourselves when the unanticipated comes our way. This exercise is a place to acknowledge the importance of celebrating our hard work.

### OUTCOME

Circle participants will practice facing the challenges of being an activist and strengthen their inner resources.

**TIME NEEDED:** 45 minutes

### MATERIALS

- flip chart paper and markers

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. Acknowledge for participants that in doing social justice work we can find ourselves not only at odds with people we don’t know but challenged by those who are close to us. Ask the Circle to brainstorm the messages they have heard from people, both verbally and nonverbally: *you are naive, you don’t have the facts, the cold shoulder, etc.* Capture these on a flip chart.
2. Ask participants to share their stories of what they have encountered. You may want to do the story sharing in groups of three, especially if people really need time to process their experiences.
3. Now, ask participants to brainstorm ways to respond to the messages and write the responses on the flip chart, next to the messages captured in Step 1.
4. Next, ask participants to role play in pairs, responding to the person who has most unnerved them. Ask them to select one of the messages they have encountered and to try on several of the responses.
5. To end, ask everyone to share stories of when they felt that they had held their own in the face of one of these challenges. Ask them to share as well the ways they take care of themselves and celebrate the work they are doing.

### NOTES TO FACILITATORS

The most important piece of this exercise is the opportunity for people to say out loud where they get challenged and to share ways to stay connected to themselves and their commitment to justice work. If the brainstorming seems to be too formal for the group or the role playing isn’t engaging, don’t do it.

<sup>1</sup> The Piedmont Peace Project (PPP) is a multiracial organization that works to promote social, economic, and political justice in the rural Piedmont region of North Carolina. See [www.piedmontpeace.org](http://www.piedmontpeace.org) for more information.



# Ending Your Circle

All Circles celebrate the ending of their time together. In Session 12 we recommend the exercise *Reviewing the Circle: Identifying Its Strengths and Positive Core*, page 69, to review what the Circle participants have learned and are taking away with them. Sometimes there is energy to continue. Participants will likely raise this towards the end and may want to explore possible future directions. Whichever direction the members of your Circle decide to go, ending this chapter is important for everyone. We have included several of our favorite closings from Circles nationwide in *Final Closing* on page 73 and recommend that you select the one that most meets the needs of your Circle. Feel free to create your own closing.



## Reviewing the Circle: Identifying Its Strengths and Positive Core

(based on the work of the tools and insights of Future Search Conferences<sup>1</sup> and Appreciative Inquiry<sup>2</sup>)

### RATIONALE

When something ends, the possibility of something new begins. Circles need to review and reflect on their time together and prepare for this transition. This exercise helps members of the Circle to reflect on some of the highlights and strengths of their time together and supports individuals to assess their desire to continue, end, or withdraw from the Circle. This exercise should be done in session 12.

### OUTCOMES

Circle participants will:

- reflect on their experiences to identify the positive core and strengths of their Circle.
- decide if they want to continue together or end the Circle.

**TIME NEEDED:** 2 hours

### MATERIALS

- multiple copies of the *Circles Review*, page 72
- flip chart and markers
- self-adhesive dots
- notes that individual members made about their vision and commitments from *Imagining the World in 2030* (optional, but helpful)

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

#### Inquiring into the Strengths and Positive Core of the Circle

1. Pass out the *Circles Review*. This can be completed in pairs (who will interview each other) or through individual reflection. Working in pairs, participants will need at least 30 minutes; individual reflection will take 20 minutes.

#### Making a Map of the Strengths and Positive Core of the Circle

2. Bring the Circle back together as a whole. Ask participants to brainstorm all their reflections about the strengths and positive elements of the Circle. Remind them that in a brainstorm, there isn't discussion or rebuttal of the ideas; all ideas will be accepted. Using large flip chart paper (if you have a

Ending  
Your  
Circle

<sup>1</sup> See Marvin Weisberg, editor. *Discovering Common Ground* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> See Diana Whitney, et al. *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003).

large wall, it is a good to tape a couple of sheets together) create a center circle and write “Strengths/Positive Core” (or a similar term that fits with the culture of your group) inside. Explain that you are going to write all of the ideas down as they are shared and that you need each participant to tell you where to locate (and write) their ideas on the emerging map. For example, one person says “Great community” and another person says, “We shared meals together.” When you ask the second person where to place their contribution on the map, they may well say near “Great community.” As a facilitator, you may feel tempted to place the ideas, but keep asking the participants where they feel their ideas should be placed. Be aware that sometimes people debate where to place other people’s ideas; remind them that this is a brainstorm and you will place an idea where its contributor thinks it should be placed. Having two scribes keeps the process moving along.

3. Once you’ve got the map made, feel free to stand back and admire the positive things about your Circle. Then hand everyone a couple of strips of self-adhesive dots. Ask them to put the dots next to what they think are the most positive things. Some people take longer to do this than others. This can be a good transition into a break, which you as facilitator will need to do a bit of work to prepare for the next step.

#### **Summarize the Positive Core**

4. Look at where the dots have landed—which are the top vote getters? There might be three really clear things that got lots of votes and scattered support for others. You can summarize the positive core for your Circle with these three things. Or the dots may be more scattered and there may be seven things that have received the top votes. That’s fine, too. However, if it looks like more than seven statements have gotten multiple votes, it may be too difficult to summarize the positive core of your Circle’s collective experience.

5. Once participants are back from break read them the statements. (If the Circle or some portion of the Circle decides to continue, they can build on the positive core of the Circle.)

#### **Identifying the Match between the Positive Core of the Circle and the Participants’ Own Visions**

6. Give participants some time for individual reflection. Encourage them to look over their notes or remember their commitments based on the Circle’s visioning. You can suggest that they reflect on:

How can I best work toward my vision of justice and the individual steps I’ve laid out for myself?

Does the positive core of the Circle meet my needs to move forward on my vision?

Do I definitely want to continue with the Circle? Am I thinking about continuing?  
Or am I clear that I don’t want to continue?

#### **Continuing the Circle**

7. Go around the Circle and ask each person share their thoughts and feelings about continuing the Circle. Ask them to be brief. There will be time to share more deeply as the Circle moves into closing this chapter and opening up a new one. Make sure that as cofacilitators you participate and share your thoughts on ending or transitioning in your role.

8. You can do a “count” and announce that all, some, or none want to continue the Circle. Whatever the Circle decides, the final session should focus on closure and appreciation of participants and facilitators. See *Final Closing*, page 73.

9. If the whole group wants to continue as a Circle, you can move into planning for the continuation of the Circle. Consider the questions on page 75.

## NOTES TO FACILITATORS

Endings and transitions can be challenging for some people. Underlying anxiety about the end of the Circle could surface in a number of ways. Here are some examples and some suggestions on how you might deal with them.

*People start to question the agenda, the plan for the session, or the exercise.* If you think this is surfacing due to hidden anxiety, you should feel free to step into your role as facilitator, naming what you are noticing yet keeping the group and the session's plan on track.

*People are upset, unhappy, or questioning that the Circle is going to end or that some participants want to leave the Circle.* You may need to remind the Circle that participants only made a commitment to 13 sessions. This chapter of the Circle will end and some people may need to leave and that is perfectly fine. This recognition of the level of commitment made originally can help people be clear about their level of commitment for the future.

*There may be a variety of feelings floating around after this Circle.* You'll want to be prepared with a closing for this session that allows for expression of feelings.

**Ending  
Your  
Circle**

## Circles Review

What worked well about our Circle? Why?

What did you value most about your time in our Circle?

When did you feel that our Circle was most grounded in spirit? What supported spirit to be present at that time?

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Your  
Circle**

When did you feel or see that our Circle was working to build bridges across differences and toward true community? What supported that to happen? What did people do to make this possible?

Tell a story about something that you have changed or done differently in your life a result of being in this Circle.

What about your Circle experience gives you hope that we can create relationships, institutions, and social systems that are aligned with our highest values?

## Final Closing

### RATIONALE

Relationships develop and communities are built as a result of people participating in the Circle journey. Closing the Circle acknowledges and honors what has been created. We have collected some of our favorite final closings from Circles nationwide. Feel free to create your own closing with your cofacilitator and/or participants.

### OUTCOME

Participants will have an opportunity to close the Circle and acknowledge the work that has been done and the relationships that have been built.

**TIME NEEDED:** 1+ hour is generally needed for closings

**1. Naming Our Intentions** from the Curriculum Committee

**Materials:** a large bowl of sand, sheets of beeswax (available at craft stores and garden stores), lengths of string for each candle that serve as wicks (often sold with beeswax sheets). Some participants may need a flat surface (like a book or a table) to roll their candle on.

Give each participant a sheet of beeswax and a wick. Remind them that there is power in naming the intentions we want to manifest. Ask Circle participants sit in silence and to privately articulate their hopes and dreams, commitments and intentions. (For example: what we commit to doing, what we want for our community, etc.) As they roll the beeswax and wick into a candle, they will roll in their intentions. When each participant is finished making their candles, they are asked to light it and to say out loud their hopes or dreams or commitments or intentions. When they are done, they can place their candle in a circle in the sand. This closing is complete when everyone has placed their candle in the sand. Circle participants often spontaneously offer other pieces to this closing. It is important that the candles are not moved until they have completely burned out. In the Wiccan tradition, blowing the candles out blows the intentions away.

**2. Cards to Each Other** from the San Francisco Women's Circle

**Materials:** one card for each person (card stock paper folded in half or greeting cards, purchased in advance, that include inspirational quotes)

Ask each participant to say one thing that they will take away from the Circle. Everyone selects a card and writes their name at the top. Then everyone passes their card to the person on their right. This person will write whatever they want to say; everyone in the Circle will eventually have a chance to write something in each person's card. (The cards should be passed at the same time, so make sure everyone is done with their entry before passing the cards to the next person.) End by standing in a circle, holding hands, and calling each person into the Circle. Go around and say one word about the person in the center and then chant their name.

Ending  
Your  
Circle

### 3. Post-its to You from the Philadelphia Circle

**Materials:** Post-its

Pass out a packet of Post-its, one to each person. Ask participants to write adjectives to describe each other on Post-it notes. When everyone is ready, they can place the Post-its on the back of the person. Invite everyone to walk around silently reading each other's "backs." Invite participants to help each other get the notes off their backs. To end, ask each person to read their own Post-it notes out loud, beginning each statement with "I am ..." or "I have ...". For example: "I am powerful beyond my dreams. I am as strong as the wind. I have such courage!"

### 4. Cast in Stone from the Amherst Circle

**Materials:** stones (someone in our Circle had a collection of heart-shaped stones that we used, but any stones will work)—a few more than the number of participants.

In this closing, each participant will leave with a stone; some believe that stones can hold whatever is spoken into them. Each person is given an opportunity to offer everyone else in the Circle an affirmation, blessing, or wish as the stones are passed around. Ask participants to sit in a circle. One at a time, each person selects a stone for the participant on their right and offers their heartfelt words. Then the stone is passed to the person on their left, who shares their affirmation, blessing, or wish, until the stone comes full circle to the person the Circle is honoring. They pocket their stone and the group continues around the circle. (It is important to decide beforehand how much time you have for this closing. You can suggest that only one person speak into the stone for each Circle participant; this can take an hour. Allow more time if everyone in the Circle wants to say something to everyone else; this can take several hours.)

Ending  
Your  
Circle

## "I'm So Glad That You Are in the Fight!"

by Skylar Fein, Philadelphia Circle facilitator

*At our final Circle gathering, after our closing, we stood and I taught the group a song, "I'm So Glad That You Are in the Fight!" I learned it from someone who sang it in civil rights marches in the South; they sang it to keep their spirits up during long stretches. It goes, "I'm so glad that [Barry's] in the fight," with each person's name being sung in turn, until everyone has been serenaded. When we sang it, we danced and hollered and the whole neighborhood could hear us cheering in the crazy heat.*

What If Members  
of Your Circle  
Decide to  
Continue?

*“People were very concerned about the fate of the Circle. Looking at what needs the Circle was meeting and where people wanted to go was rich. There was never an inkling of discontinuing. The question was not “if” we should continue to meet but “what would we do together.”*

—a Seattle facilitator

**S**ometimes all the members of a Circle decide to stay together to continue their work. In other Circles, only some of the members decide to continue. And in others, at the end of the 13 weeks, the Circle ends. If your Circle or some of its members decide to continue together, suggest that they meet after session 13, so that the Circle can officially end and people who want to leave can do so.

If someone wants to start their own Circle, encourage them to contact Spirit in Action at [info@spiritinaction.net](mailto:info@spiritinaction.net) or 413-256-4612.

The facilitators will want to decide whether or not they will continue in their role. Your Circle will need to be deliberate about its transition in leadership. Many groups have found success in rotating facilitation, and this is a good time to begin that rotation. Other members can take responsibility for setting up the first gathering after the official Circle has ended.

When you do meet again, the group should be encouraged to think creatively about the possibilities. You can meet weekly, monthly, or once a year. You can work on a particular issue. Or work on a collective action. (Because many Circles have wanted to move to action, we have created the exercise *Moving Circles to Collective Action*, page 76.) The group can become a support group to each other. You can meet outdoors, near water, in a valley, on mountain top, under a full moon, at a sunrise, at a fire circle, in a sauna, at a concert, at a play or an art event, or at a rally.

The following questions might be useful to those initial discussions:

- How can we continue to deepen our connections with one another, our lives, and our work for social change?
- What area(s) or topics/questions will our group focus on? (You can build on some of the positive aspects identified as part of *Reviewing the Circle: Identifying Its Strengths and Positive Core*, page 69. You can use *Moving Circles to Collective Action*, page 76 if the group identifies action as its focus.)
- How long do we want to commit to? Will we go on indefinitely? Do we want to set a certain amount of time (three months? a year?) and then revisit our decision at the end of that time?
- When and where will we meet? (It helps to have a set schedule so you don't have to spend time scheduling at each gathering.)
- Will we continue to share food?
- Do we want to recruit more participants? If yes, how will we do this and what will we do to help the new people become part of the Circle? (We strongly suggest that you continue as a diverse group. Your Circle may want to articulate a vision for this diversity and set some goals.)
- Can Circle members who initially decided not to continue visit or rejoin us later on?

However you continue, we encourage you to choose a way that connects with spirit, heals divisions, sustains hope, and inspires action. Please contact Spirit in Action with questions you have or to support your Circle as it takes shape. And please share your stories of what happens with us!

Continuing  
Your  
Circle

# Moving Circles to Collective Action

*An Exercise for Circles That Decide to Continue*

## RATIONALE

Collective action is not the intention of Circles of Change. Many participants who join Circles are already very active. However, some Circles and some members within Circles want to take action. This exercise gives groups who want to pursue action a process for collective action.

## OUTCOME

Circle participants will develop goals, strategies, a work plan, and a time line for their collective action.

## MATERIALS

- flip chart paper and markers
- multiple copies of the worksheet on page 78

## STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

### Remembering Our Vision for Peace and Justice

1. Revisit what folks came up with as a result of *Imaging the World in 2030*. Also revisit what the group has understood its positive core to be as a result of *Reviewing the Circle: Identifying Its Strengths and Positive Core*. Share in a discussion:

What were some of the specific goals we envisioned?

What is our positive core that we can draw on?

Capture the discussion on a flip chart.

2. Now add to the discussion:

What goals are we interested in exploring more deeply?

What are our priorities?

3. Decide on a goal.

### Assessing Our Community

4. Define who you mean when you say “our community.” This could be a geographic community, a specific neighborhood, a particular constituency (for example, health care workers), etc.

5. Answer the following questions to assess the needs of your community.

What is important to people in our community?

Where do we see needs? What are concerns in our community?

What are the seeds of hope in our community?

What groups or people in our community are already working on our same goals?

What are we inspired to do?

If the group is unsure about the answer to these questions, the first step in your Circle’s action is to talk to folks in the community. Ask them the questions you are asking yourselves. People welcome the opportunity to be listened to. A listening project can be an important and empowering first step of action. You would collect the information from these interviews and meet back again to decide on a course of



action based on what you heard. Not only is it a good way to be sure that your action is grounded in the community, it is also a good way to recruit members of the community who might be interested in working with you.

**6.** Now consider—what are five different ways we could work toward our goals within our community? Capture the conversation on the flip chart. The information can be recorded like this:

Goal	How would it make our community/the world a better place?
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

### **Choose One Change**

**7.** As you look over the goals and their impacts on your community/the world, choose the goal that best meets the following standards for productive change.

Does it make positive things happen?

Will it involve the people in our community, building leadership, self-esteem, etc.?

Can people in our community help plan the change, make it happen, and sustain it?

Will meeting our goal help our community to continue to move toward our vision for peace and justice?

Will we be able to see the difference we have made?

Add any other criteria that you feel is important to consider. Often, the answers to these questions lead to action.

### **Creating an Action Plan**

**8.** Invite all of the interested volunteers to a meeting.

**9.** On flip chart paper write your goal and the changes you have envisioned. Answer the following questions and capture them on the flip chart as well.

What activity (project) will we organize to meet our goal and create this change?

How does this change make positive things happen in the community?

How will it involve a diverse group of people in the community, especially the people directly impacted?

How will we develop leadership?

How can people from the community help plan the change, make it happen, and sustain it?

How will the change help our community continue to move forward toward our vision for peace and justice?

How will our community be able to see the difference we have made?

**10.** Make a contact list of the volunteers and distribute to everyone in the group.

**11.** Clarify the vision, goals, and proposed project/action for everyone present.

**12.** Choose a leader.

**13.** Fill out the worksheet on page 78 together. Make copies for everyone.

If, at the end of this meeting, you don't have enough people to commit to the action plan, you need to go back to the beginning and revise your plan so it is realistic. One of the first strategies would be outreach to get more volunteers involved.

<b>ACTION STEPS</b> <i>What will we do?</i>	<b>STRATEGY</b> <i>How will we do it?</i>	<b>TEAM MEMBER RESPONSIBLE</b> <i>Who will do it?</i>	<i>By when?</i>	<b>RESOURCES NEEDED</b> <i>(\$/other)</i>
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				

Continuing  
Your  
Circle



# *Sharing Our Wisdom*

**Supporting Your Facilitation**



## T H E P O W E R O F H O P E , F A I T H , A N D V I S I O N I N G

**W**e believe that leaders working for social change have the responsibility to work from a place of hope, as it is only in acting on our dreams for justice that we will be able to actually create and sustain that justice. Our capacity to imagine a different future makes a different future possible. Our commitment to a world where peace and justice prevail is connected to people and movements already alive in the world—a world planted in interdependent relationships, composted in trust, flowering into forgiveness and reconciliation. As facilitators, we have the opportunity and the obligation to create spaces for people to truly explore how to live in hope.

We can do this by finding ways to open hearts to hope so that we can believe in something more whole, more loving, and more joyful. By sharing stories that inspire each other we are reminded that change is possible.

We can do this by supporting people so that they can meaningfully engage in visioning. Visioning is grounded in our longing for justice. Stepping into its cloak we are temporarily free to dream, suspending the realities of injustice and oppression that hurt us in so many ways. Visioning lifts up the inner voice of imagination and allows us to experience the reforming of relationships. It invites us to manifest the consciousness we want to inhabit, reclaiming another world that is possible.

We can facilitate hope and possibility by asking the question “where can we grow what is working?” It is more often useful to call forward what is working than to focus on what is not.

And we can facilitate hope with the help of community, tools, and resources to support ourselves. This section is one part of that support.

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## Facilitating Circles Is Hard Work

### **Cofacilitate Circles of Change.**

The cofacilitation of Circles is an opportunity to create new ways and to reclaim traditional ways of working collectively. Cofacilitating allows us to stretch ourselves. It allows different perspectives and styles to emerge. It provides support to facilitators and to Circle participants. It is important that as cofacilitators you reflect the diversity of your community and Circle participants.

### **Build in time to reflect on your facilitating and cofacilitating.**

Facilitating is a complex task. When we take time to reflect on it we allow space for our inner wisdoms to be heard. Before starting your Circle, spend some time with your cofacilitator getting to know each other. Once your Circle begins, reflect on how you are working together and how your Circle is going. Build in reflection time, individually and collectively—journal, take a walk after each Circle gathering, plan to have a weekly meal with your cofacilitator. Use these questions to guide your reflection and evaluation:

What did we plan to do at this session? What did we actually do?

Which activities worked well or didn't work well? Any thoughts about what contributed to activities working or not working?

What did each of us learn about ourselves as facilitators in this session?

What was our greatest learning or challenge from the session?

How does what we and our group are experiencing/learning help us to think about building a broad-based movement?

### **Facilitating is demanding; take care of your self.**

*"The self-care has been missing from social change movements and communities. Burn-out is everywhere. It isn't just the physical lack of self-care that causes burn-out though, it stems from the fact that so many movements are isolated and intense."*—an Amherst Circle facilitator

Taking care of ourselves as leaders and feeding our own spirits while facilitating Circles is important. Facilitators do a lot of nurturing and do not always get the nurturing in return. Yet, we know that honoring the sacredness of others begins by honoring the sacredness of ourselves. It is important that we take care of ourselves so that we can sustain our role as facilitators of Circles of Change and in movement building over a lifetime. Some find that connecting to the natural world is a source of grounding and inspiration. Many Circle facilitators have spiritual practices that support their growth and development. Although it is not necessary, a spiritual practice is a habit that can bring us back to our own center and connect us to something bigger than ourselves. Meditation, chanting, and yoga are practices that facilitators have found helpful. Singing, dancing, drumming, painting, and writing poetry are other ways. Talking to mentors and participating in support groups can also provide the support you might need to take care of yourself.

## The Gift of Facilitating

by Megan Voorhees, Berkeley Circle facilitator  
and member of the Curriculum Committee

*I learned so much from facilitating a Circle of Change, probably more than I learned when I was a participant in a Circle, and definitely more than my Circle participants did! I have used the tools and activities from the curriculum many times, and I have been profoundly affected by the vision of Spirit in Action. Because of what I learned from facilitating, I now run an annual retreat for college students at the University of California, Berkeley, called “Soul Food for the Activist: Practices to Sustain Ourselves for a Lifetime of Service” and I have probably used at least six of the activities in over 20 settings. It was definitely worth the work that went into facilitating a Circle just for the learning, not to mention all the other benefits*

### Some things we keep in mind when we facilitate.

As a result of our own facilitation of Circles, the Curriculum Committee identified the following:

- Be clear about your role as the facilitator. Don't be afraid to be powerful.
- Encourage participants to take responsibility for their own needs, experiences, and actions.
- Be humble and be honest when you don't know where to go.
- Listen deeply to your cofacilitator and to the Circle participants.
- Ask participants to pay attention when an individual shares something particularly wise, and note it out loud. Noting these “wisdom” moments can be especially powerful for the group.
- Be sure to affirm the value of each of the participants in the Circle. Thanking a person in response to their sharing is an affirmation which is deepened when we name specifically what the participant did and how it affects, inspires, enriches, enhances, or changes us. Encourage Circle participants to affirm each other as well.
- Invite participants beyond their common ground to a higher ground. Push the edges. Contradict the normal way we do things and resist returning to the status quo.
- Welcome dissonance and recognize that conflict has a purpose.

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## Stages of Group Development in Circles

If you are aware of the stages of development—its tasks and challenges—you will be better prepared to support your Circle in its process. Although every Circle has its own dynamics, this section may help you understand the ways individuals and groups behave. When groups come together for a period of time, they tend to develop in fairly predictable ways. One model for understanding these stages describes them as: Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing.<sup>1</sup> Group process is not linear. A group may stay in one stage for a long time, move to the next, and then go back. Or it may recycle through the stages of storming and norming many times as new challenges or events affect the group or individuals in the group.

### FORMING

As your Circle begins, a number of questions will naturally surface. Participants will cautiously explore the boundaries of the group and respond to the facilitators' guidance. In the forming, Circle members are trying to determine their ability to comfortably be part of the Circle. Common questions are:

- What is a Circle of Change? What is its purpose?
- What will we be doing in each session?
- How will I be part of the group?
- Who are the leaders? Are they really qualified to lead this?
- How will we develop community? Trust?

When a group first *forms*, individuals are like hesitant swimmers standing by the side of the pool and dabbling their toes in the water. A range of emotions is evident as Circles form: excitement, optimism, impatience, curiosity, caution. It may take three or four sessions before all the individuals in the Circle feel like it is really “their” Circle, so you may need to do some work to ensure that people come back each time. Here are some examples of how Circles have *formed*.

From the Amherst Circle:

*The first three sessions felt like three new forming events with new members joining or dropping out each time. This required introducing individuals to the Circle, and to each other. All of the emotions listed above were clearly evident.*

From the Louisville Circle on their first night:

*It was really neat how everyone just got into this personal place. We all had the same thoughts in that we wanted the group to be a place where we could take off our political activist hats and do some healing and growing for ourselves.*

From a San Francisco Circle on their first night:

*We reflected how much richness of experience there was in the Circle ... a learning community. We also shared our belief that what came up for each of us in the Circle was going to be exactly what we needed to learn. We are planning to make this a major theme, as a way to encourage responsibility, and also to prepare for if/when things get rockier ... I was surprised at how much the group wanted to connect!*

<sup>1</sup> Peter Sholtes, Brian L. Joiner, Barbara Streibel. *The Team Handbook* (Joiner/Oriel Inc., 1996).

As in building a house, *forming* is important for the potential success of the Circle. Responding to *forming* questions is critical; your honesty and clarity will help. Trust can develop in the Circle if cofacilitators are organized, able to sense where individuals are in the group, and secure in their role as facilitators.

## **STORMING**

In *storming* conflicts can surface around any number of issues. Resistance to and confusion about what the Circle is doing and where it is going are often part of *storming*. If conflict is not addressed it can affect the life of the rest of the Circle.

From a San Francisco Circle on their second night:

*People started a discussion on time, as one person said it was hard to be so time-limited, both in the first session and during the Spirit in Action Journey Mapping. Many others in the group expressed agreement, and my cofacilitator agreed and acknowledged that there wasn't enough time, and then also said that because the group didn't arrive on time, that it was hard to give everyone a chance to share enough. This segued into a conversation about how we want to be together, and we as facilitators committed to give more sharing time, and offered the group some choices about starting with dinner so the opening circle wasn't disrupted and giving more leeway to lateness. Only a couple of people wanted this, with the majority saying (even one chronically late person) that they wanted the opening at the beginning as an incentive so people would come on time. We ended up recommitting to being on time.*

From a facilitator of the same Circle on their fifth night:

*I asked the group to think about us as community, and to share some of their thoughts about how we were functioning. This obviously opened up a big discussion, which I think the group was ready to have. Some of the themes of the discussion included a desire to rotate hosting of the Circle, an interest in sharing facilitation, and feeling like there was too much structure. I thanked everyone for their input and said how I would respond briefly, and that my cofacilitator and I would discuss further the participant facilitator option. I felt comfortable with this and said it would involve them doing some pre-established exercises.*

As facilitators, you can help the group move through *storming* successfully or can inadvertently keep the group in it. *Storming* is normal. If it doesn't happen on some level, individuals have not fully owned the group as their own. Facilitators can listen and affirm the feelings and thoughts of individual Circle members. It also helps to keep the group's agreements and the goals of Circles of Change at the forefront; the group can't be everything to everybody. Be careful not to stifle people's strong emotions or conflicts, as it can lead to disharmony. Embracing *storming* provides an opportunity for the Circle members to develop confidence in each other and trust in the group. (For more ideas on facilitating conflict, see *What Do We Do If Our Circle Is Struggling?*, page 85.)

## **NORMING**

During *norming*, members reconcile differences and re-establish their norms and direction. Conflict is reduced and Circle members develop trust and are able to function as a group. The group has more confidence in its ability to express constructive criticism and to accept differences in personalities and contributions. A sense of cohesion emerges and the group is able to focus its energy.

From the Amherst Circle:

*The Circle reconciled the loss of two members and revisited where we were as a group. Were we all committed to continue? Was it clear what we were doing? What was working for us? How do we all respond to our new membership, minus two? These questions were answered to the satisfaction of every remaining Circle member, and the rest of the curriculum could be followed and completed in the next six weeks.*

In *norming* you really want to help the group renegotiate who they are and why they are doing what they are doing. It is really another round of *forming* with the addition of trust. Real ownership of the Circle and a vision of success emerges. Some Circles can be at this stage after the first two or three sessions, others may not arrive here until the end of the 13 sessions.

## PERFORMING

In *performing* Circle participants work together to achieve their goals. The group will have settled, at least for now, into its relationships and rhythms. They develop skills to work together cooperatively, discovering and accepting each other's strengths and weaknesses. There is a greater satisfaction with the Circle as a result of moving through the group process, together. Conflicts may still arise; however, the confidence they have developed in their ability to resolve challenges is the norm.

From the Amherst Circle:

*Sessions six through twelve were much more cooperative and meaningful. We knew the routine and there was a mutual respect and oneness in our coming together weekly. The group produced a beautifully written statement on community and spirit and felt like we were successful after all. Ending the group brought some sadness and joy in having gone through the process of the four stages of group development and feeling as if everyone cared about each other.*

From a San Francisco Circle in their ninth session:

*As the sessions progressed other group members were encouraged to cofacilitate some of the Circles with us. This was the first time group members had the opportunity to be on the other side. It proved to be a useful way to move the group into visioning and to include each other's experience in the unfolding of our process.*

In *performing* facilitation will be easier as others will take on more of the Circle's responsibilities. Following the group's process is an effective way a facilitator can support the Circle *performing* well.



## What Do We Do If Our Circle Is Struggling?

Circles may struggle in distinct ways. When this happens, we find ourselves, as facilitators, in our deepest need. Because facilitating groups through conflict is difficult, you may want to familiarize yourself with the work of Marshall Rosenberg. See *Facilitators' Tools and Resources*, on page 110. Sometimes talking with another skilled facilitator can help. Spirit in Action can help you connect with other Circle facilitators. Here are some of the struggles we have experienced in Circles and how we have addressed them.

### **The Circle is “stuck.”**

*It may be useful to name what you have noticed as the facilitator and ask “how can we move on?” or “what might need to be addressed or healed?”*

There might have been a moment, comment, or process in an exercise that has led to the group getting stuck. Allow time to reflect on what happened. Time is a gift that facilitators can give to Circles.

*Reconnect with self and with our larger intentions.*

Allow participants time to reconnect to their hearts and inner wisdom, as well as to their larger intentions. Sometimes an analysis of what’s happening can be useful; sometimes a moment of silence is what’s needed. Provide a few moments so participants can be quiet. Ask them to bring to the Circle what they hear. Wisdom is likely to emerge. Innovations often occur.

*Shift the energy.*

Sometimes a group just needs to play, laugh or move. Dancing, singing, integrating art into an exercise, going for walk together, taking a break, or leading a *Group Energizer* (see page 92) works well.

### **The Circle is moving forward but one of the members is not.**

There are times when Circles need to respond to individual needs.

*Remind the group of the purpose of the Circle or a particular exercise.*

Check in with participants about where they are in relation to that purpose.

*Create space for the individual to name what s/he needs.*

This is a simple thing to do and often effective.

*Break into partners.*

Invite participants to talk about their feeling or to explore their resistance with others. Often, when one person in a group is feeling something, others are too.

*Ask the individual to trust the process or you, the facilitator.*

If trust has developed in the Circle, draw on it *and* take into account what it is the individual needs as you move forward with your session plan.



## Can we really proceed with our session plans given the grief and pain in the room?

There may be times when you sense the group needs something different from what you had planned. Listen to the Circle's needs and be open to the possibility of letting go of your original plan. Sometimes an exercise or a conversation brings up deep despair in a Circle. You might lead *Speaking Our Heart's Truth* (see page 53). Other times, a participant might be confronted by a difficulty in their life between sessions. As the cofacilitators, trust yourselves to respond. However, don't feel like you have to change your plans because an exercise is generating conflict or challenging the group. Difficult times are often the times a Circle grows together as a community.

### A Spontaneous Healing Circle

from the facilitator of the Philadelphia Women's Circle

*One of the women told me that earlier in the day she had seen her surgeon who told her she felt a mass in her left breast. She had been diagnosed with breast cancer two years ago, and had undergone chemotherapy and radiation and was feeling great, so this news was a shock. She wasn't sure if she should come to the group. I insisted that she was part of our Circle, and that everyone would want to know what was going on.*

*When the group arrived, we did a 15 minute meditation with several people breaking out in song. I then asked if we could do a healing circle for her. She came into the middle of the circle, and received toning from one of the members, while the rest of us laid our hands on various parts of her body. A chant was offered along with various prayers. We then sat in silence for about five minutes.*

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### Our Circle is in conflict and we are not sure what to do.

Conflict often occurs in Circles, sometimes about any number of serious issues. Sometimes the conflict is about relatively mild disagreements caused by assumptions that have been made or differences of opinions. Pay attention to the signs that indicate potential conflict: silence or shutting down, self-righteousness, invalidation of others, projection, criticism, blaming or shaming, expressions of confusion, fear, or strong emotions. Conflict provides an opportunity to build community.

*Reconnect to the agreements that the Circle set at the first gathering.*

They were created to support the Circle in working from a place of respect and open hearts. This is a time to use them.

*Listen.*

Listen to both verbal messages and nonverbal messages. Listen without judging as right or wrong, good or bad. Encourage participants to share their points of view without judgment. And, listen for what people want to happen. Sometimes people who are calling for action just want to be heard; other times they are really needing a concrete action.

*Paraphrase and reflect back what people say.*

*Ask clarifying questions from a place of real curiosity.*

*Check the assumptions you are making.*

Suggest that other Circle members check theirs as well.

*Reconnect with self and with our larger intentions.*

**As a facilitator, I don't feel like I get to participate in the group like I want. I feel like I have to be the "group police" all the time.**

Explore why you are feeling this way. Are you experiencing internalized oppression? Are you facilitating using a "power-over" model, which the group is reacting to? Is this your issue or is it something that is really happening in the group? Talk with your cofacilitator and explore the source of your frustration. You might choose to share your feelings with the group, as this facilitator in Philadelphia did: "I raised my concerns about how I was feeling as facilitator. We discussed when to start, having a timekeeper that was not me, and how to have a group process without cutting people off, looking at how we interrupt others. We also had discussions around cultural issues, interrupting, and white privilege. We discussed the need for activists to listen and not always react—to see listening and silence as part of a spiritual practice."

## **A Quick Guide to Howard Gardner's<sup>1</sup> Multiple Intelligences**

Because people have different learning styles, including a variety of activities in the exercises will help everyone to stay engaged.

People with **verbal-linguistic intelligence** are "word smart." They enjoy reading, writing, storytelling, poetry, public speaking, journaling, creative writing, verbal debate, and humor.

People with **logical-mathematical intelligence** are "number and reasoning smart." They enjoy asking questions, clarifying their reasoning, problem solving, scientific research, data, and logic.

People with **visual-spatial intelligence** are "picture smart." They enjoy designing and creating, guided visualizations, videos, "doodling," working with color, collages, painting, drawing, diagrams, and visuals.

People with **bodily-kinesthetic intelligence** are "body smart." They enjoy physical movement, hands-on activities, skits, mimes, role playing, dancing, inventing, and sports.

People with **musical intelligence** are "rhythm smart." They enjoy singing, rapping, varied pitches and rhythms when people speak, asking people to attach a rhythm to an idea, and background music.

People with **interpersonal intelligence** are "people smart." They enjoy group projects, discussions, relationship building, storytelling, leading others, interviewing, giving and receiving feedback, teaching each other, and creating time to share feelings.

People with **intrapersonal intelligence** are "self smart." They enjoy working, creating and brainstorming alone, clear goals, regular time for self-reflection and/or spiritual practice, "cosmic" questions, and journaling.

People with **naturalist intelligence** are "nature smart." They like being surrounded by plants and enjoy meeting outside and in nature, connecting ideas to the rhythms of nature, discovering patterns, eating healthy food, and recycling.

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<sup>1</sup> Howard Gardner authored the theory of multiple intelligences. For more information, go to [www.pz.harvard.edu](http://www.pz.harvard.edu) to learn more about Project Zero, where he was codirector for 25 years, working with colleagues to apply this theory.

# Circle Openings

## RATIONALE

A Circle opening at the beginning of the session creates a space in which everyone is invited to be present and to participate. Just like first impressions, the quality of the opening can set the tone for the entire gathering. Openings can be done when a Circle first gathers, before or after you eat.

### 1. Creating a Table of Inspiration

**TIME NEEDED:** 30 minutes

**MATERIALS:** a cloth or a small, low table in the center of the room

Many Circles have created an inspiration table (some call it an altar) as a way to connect with each other and with spirit. Roberto Vargas of New World Associates<sup>1</sup>, who trained Circle facilitators in 2002, even uses it in his work with secular groups. It requires that you talk to participants ahead of time, asking them to bring an item that represents a certain aspect of themselves, their lives, their source of inspiration, their work in the world, etc.

Prepare a central place in the room on a low table or on the floor. Use a nice cloth and a central candle to mark this area. Depending on the group, you might place a beautiful rock or crystal, something from nature, a vase of flowers, or even a goddess figure. Begin with a moment of silence or a grounding meditation. Then ask each person to share their item and tell how it represents who they are. When they are done speaking, they should place it on the inspiration table. To end, you might want to comment on how the energy of the items will gather the group's energy and that each one will go home slightly changed, just as we as individuals are changed by sharing with each other. (Many Circles set up inspiration tables at each of their gatherings, for the duration of their Circle, adding to them as needed.)

### 2. Acknowledging Each Other

**TIME NEEDED:** 10 minutes

Form two concentric circles, the inner group facing the outer. Allow each pair to acknowledge each other in any way they want. Then have people in the outside circle take one step to the left and acknowledge their new partner. Then have everyone in the inside circle take one step to the left, repeating the process until a complete rotation has been made.

### 3. Setting Our Intentions

**TIME NEEDED:** 15 minutes

**MATERIALS AND SET-UP:** votive candles (at least one for each participant), matches, a large mat or cloth or piece of paper with a circle drawn in the middle (to create an inside and outside space)

<sup>1</sup> For more information on Roberto Vargas and New World Associates contact 510-538-0895 or email him at [vargasrc@aol.com](mailto:vargasrc@aol.com).

Ask participants sit in a circle around the centerpiece. Explain that the circle on the paper represents the container for the group's work during the session. Begin with a moment of silence while each person reflects on the work they have been called to do and an intention for the gathering. Ask each person to share their intention. When they are done, they light a votive and place it inside the circle.

#### 4. Welcoming Spirit Through Food

**TIME NEEDED:** 10 minutes

**MATERIALS:** a candle, fresh homegrown fruits and vegetables

In the Chinese healing arts tradition, spirit enters our being in three ways after we separate from our mothers at birth: through breath, through what we eat, and through loving relationships. This opening welcomes spirit through what we eat. Bring freshly harvested or homegrown produce to the Circle, enough so each participant can select one. (Pea pods, baby carrots, strawberries, anything seasonal will do. If your Circle is held in a part of the country during maple-sugaring season, the same opening can be done using maple sugar water rather than garden produce.)

Ask participants to sit in a circle, lighting a candle to focus their attention. Pass around a basket of freshly harvested offerings; each participant selects one. When everyone has a vegetable or fruit, invite participants to welcome spirit into their bodies, in their own ways as they eat their selection. Sit quietly for a few minutes, allowing participants the space to consciously welcome and give thanks to spirit.

#### 5. Meditations

**TIME NEEDED:** 15 minutes

Meditations are a good way to open a Circle. Silent meditations ground us in our higher selves, remind us of our core wisdom and connect us with the place where spirit dwells. Nearly all religious traditions value silence and meditation. You, or a member of your Circle, can lead a meditation. (See Margo Adair's books in *Resources for Supporting Circles of Change*, page 107.) Or you may just want to ask for silence. Meditation can be done in stillness, but walking and dancing meditations can also be incredibly powerful.

When leading a meditation, make sure that people are comfortable and can breathe easily. Make sure the group will not be disturbed by outside noises, cell phones, etc. Start each meditation by asking the group to take a few breaths and allow them to continue until you can sense that the group is more relaxed and present. When you finish a meditation, be sure to give people enough time to open their eyes on their own time and allow the group to stay in silence for a few minutes so people can personally process their experiences. These are a few examples of meditations that Circle facilitators have led.

**Loving-kindness meditation** Ask the group to send loving-kindness to themselves, others in the room, those they love, those they feel some anger toward because of injustice done to them, to a community, and then to the country, the planet, and the universe. Be sure to move slowly through this process so participants can visualize each step and register how it feels to send loving-kindness throughout the world.

**Meditation on compassion and healing** Ask people to breathe light in and out of their hearts and then to imagine themselves in front of a group of people or other living beings that they feel compassion for, and to breathe in light and breathe out healing and ease of suffering from their hearts. Then ask them to bring their attention to the people to their left and right who are also working to ease suffering, and to feel themselves connected to those people. Then acknowledge that there are many suffering beings who are not being held in the Circle, and ask them to breathe in light and send loving energy and compassion from the Circle out to all beings.

**Energy Circle** Ask the group to sit in a circle and hold hands. Ask participants to think of someone who inspires them and to call that person's energy into the Circle, welcoming the energy into the Circle and into their own bodies. Then ask them to share the energy around the Circle through their right hand, and to welcome the Circle's energy through their left

hand. The energy should be moving left to right. Encourage them to let the energy swell in their bodies and in the Circle. (For more information on energy circles, see Margo Adair's books in *Resources for Supporting Circles of Change*, page 107.)

## 6. Opening the Circle with Music

**TIME NEEDED:** 10 minutes

**MATERIALS:** a CD player

Music offers a language of inspiration that can reach people in ways that talking might not. Ask someone to lead the group in song. Or ask participants to bring a favorite song on a CD to play for the group. Depending on the music ask the group to dance, stretch, warm-up, or meditate. (A participant in a Circle in Philadelphia collected a favorite song from each person in the Circle, and then made a CD for each person to keep when the group ended.)

## 7. Inviting the Spirit of Others

**TIME NEEDED:** 15 minutes

Before doing any of the following openings, it can be helpful to ask the group to take a few moments of silence or meditative breathing in order to center the group.

**Gratitude for Another** Ask people to think of someone who immediately brings to mind gratitude or an open-hearted feeling when they think of them—someone who has been instrumental in their spirit and action journey. Ask people to allow themselves to sit silently with the feeling of gratitude or inspiration conjured by connecting with their person. Ask them to notice where they feel the gratitude in their bodies. Breathe in the gratitude and breathe out the hope that all people may connect with that sense of gratitude in their lives. Sit for a few minutes with this feeling.

*“The meditation on someone who brings gratitude worked really well. It opened people’s hearts and the sharing after that was beautiful. There were tears and people were obviously sharing connections to people that have changed their lives.”* —a Boston Circle facilitator

**Our Spiritual Teachers** Ask participants to share the name of one person who was important to them in their spiritual growth. Ask them to say one sentence about that person.

**Calling All Who Inspire Us** Stand in a circle holding hands. Invite people to call in their ancestors and those people whom the participants want to affect through their work for social change.

## Inviting Spirit—Creating an Altar

by Skylar Fein, Philadelphia Circle facilitator

*We opened with each person welcoming spirit in his or her own way. I love this opening and feel like we could use it every time without wearing it out. Next we said that we were going to build an altar and noted that the word can trigger strong feelings in people, and we welcomed those feelings. We explained that we saw the altar not as a symbol of outside authority, but of the invitation to spirit that we had just done, a way of literally making space for the many views, paths, gods, goddesses, and spirits in the room. Creating an altar seems like a sure-fire winner to me. I’ve always enjoyed it and I’ve never seen it bomb. Strangely, the best one I ever saw was one that Linda Stout led in Philadelphia. Participants had not been asked to bring an object with them for an altar, so we scoured the house we were meeting in to find something that represented what inspired us and/or our spirituality. After each person placed their object on the altar, they were invited to say a few things about its significance. A warm and powerful feeling (spirit?) pervaded the room.*



## T O O L S T O B U I L D C O M M U N I T Y

## Check-Ins

### RATIONALE

Check-ins allow time for people to connect to each other. They can be done before, during, or after the meal or just after the *Circle Opening*.

**TIME NEEDED:** 15 minutes

### PROCESS

Decide how much time your Circle has so you can provide equal time for each person to “check in.” Check-ins can be done with the whole group, in a small group, or in pairs. Make sure people know how much time they each have. Time seems to fly by for the person who is sharing (“my time’s up already!”) and can crawl by when check-ins go too long. Once participants are comfortable with each other they often go well beyond their allotted time. Be clear: “Everyone has a couple of minutes to check-in.” Use a timer, bell, or a hand signal to let people know when their time is up. When Circles use up all their meeting time checking in, they may be avoiding moving into the session’s topics.

#### 1. Questions for Check-Ins

Use any of these questions for sharing—in pairs or in small groups.

How are you?

What are the events and stories from your week that you need to share in order to be present?

What is of concern or a cause of celebration from this past week?

What challenged you this week?

What has been a source of inspiration? What has fed your heart?

What is something about you that nobody here knows or would imagine about you?

#### 2. The Gesture Check-In

This check-in will often bring enthusiastic energy to the group. Be sure to create safe space for people to play with it! Ask people to stand in a circle. Have someone make a sound or gesture that communicates “how this day went for them.” The next person then repeats that sound or gesture and then the next person repeats that sound until it comes back to the person who first made it. Then the next person should make a sound/gesture about the day and the group should share it back. After the last person’s gesture, ask everyone to make their own gesture three times.

#### 3. Highs and Lows from the Day

Hand out slips of paper. Ask people to write on one of the sheets things they want to “hold onto” from their day. On another sheet ask them to write things they want to “let go of” from their day. Have everyone share their sheets, pocketing what they want to keep and discarding the rest into a big bowl.

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#### 4. Buddies From Training for Change

This can be used throughout the Circle as a way for people to support one other person. Match people up in pairs or “buddies” randomly or intentionally. Give these buddies time in each gathering to connect with each other. The first time buddies meet, you may want to lead them through a sentence completion exercise:

You’ll be glad I’m your buddy because ...

You can support me by ...

I might resist support by ...

You can support me anyway by ...

Then ask the second person to complete the same statements. Be sure to encourage the “listeners” to listen actively.

### Group Energizers

*If you sense that the Circle is losing energy, you might want to lead a short energizer to revitalize the group. There will probably be participants in your group who can come up with their own ideas for energizers, which makes this a perfect five-minute exercise to delegate. Here are a couple of ideas. Don't be afraid to playful!*

Put on an energizing song and encourage people to dance. Some people might be resistant initially but most people become comfortable by the end of a song.

Call out different colors and have people touch those colors on each others' clothes. For example, you might call out “blue” and everyone would run to touch the people who are wearing that color, like their jeans.

Ask participants to pair off and select who will be the “leader.” Then ask the “leaders” to hold their palm a few inches in front of their “follower,” and then announce that their palm has effectively “hypnotized” the follower. The follower then needs to follow the leader, keeping their face following the leader’s hand. The leader can lead the other person around the room, moving to different heights, etc. This is a fun activity that gets people laughing and moving.



## T O O L S T O B U I L D C O M M U N I T Y

## Our Stories of Hope

### RATIONALE

This is a short exercise in which participants share stories that inspire them and give them hope. The stories not only remind us of what is possible, but also of all the ways people are already working together to create a just world.

**TIME NEEDED:** 5 minutes

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

Ask participants to share a story about something that inspires them and gives them hope. We strongly recommend that someone share a story at each gathering, and that each participant share at least once in the life of the Circle. They might share an inspirational moment from their own life, a quote, a poem, or a story about an important spiritual activist, etc. If there are people in the group who don't have ideas for what they would like to share, you might suggest that they share a story from one of these collections:

*Visionaries: People and Ideas to Change Your Life*, edited by Jay Walljasper and Jon Spayde  
(of *Utne Reader*)

*Stone Soup for the World: Life-Changing Stories of Everyday Heroes*, by Marianne Larned

It is especially wonderful to have a “storytelling” moment at the beginning of your meal together or at the beginning or the end of a Circle session.

### REFLECTION QUESTION

What is the power of sharing this story?

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## V A R I A T I O N

Collect all of the stories from the participants to create a “book of hope and possibility” for each group member to have as a gift at the end of the Circle.

# Inspirational Quotes

## RATIONALE

Our work connects us with those who have come before us. Bringing their voices into the Circle using quotes can be inspiring. And, hearing the voices of people from our own gender, race, socioeconomic class, or country can remind us of the value of our own histories.

**TIME NEEDED:** 30 minutes

## MATERIALS

- individual quotes written in large letters on flip chart paper. (Select 10–12 quotes from *Our Collection of Quotes*, page 95, and/or from your own collection, that will raise the issues and/or speak to the goals of a particular session.)
- CD player and music (like Sweet Honey in the Rock, “We Are the Ones We’ve Been Waiting For” from *Twenty-Five*)

## STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1. Hang the quotes around the room.
2. Play the song or some background music and ask people to walk around and read the quotes.
3. Invite each person to choose one quote that speaks to them and to stand by it. (It’s fine to have more than one person standing by a quote.)
4. After everyone has selected a quote to stand by, invite them to read the quote and the author’s name and to say a few words about what inspires or touches them about that quote.
5. Share what people know the author, adding your own information as needed.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How does it affect you to be surrounded by the voices of our “elders?”

How does it affect you to be surrounded by the voices of people from many cultures?

What surprises you about the information we shared about each of the people quoted?

## NOTES TO FACILITATORS

We suggest using this exercise early on in a Circle as a way to begin to build community. It can also be used as an introduction to each of the core strategies of movement building. It is really important that the quotes reflect a variety of cultures and traditions so as not to reinforce the idea that only dominant groups (rich, white, educated men) have important things to say. If you are not familiar with all those who are quoted, take some time to go to the Internet or ask others about the people you’ve selected. Often people we have learned about in one way may have made contributions that are rarely popularized, *because* of their activism. This is especially true of Helen Keller. Most people know her as the deaf, dumb, and blind girl of *The Miracle Worker*. She was a peace activist and civil rights worker and a founder of the ACLU and the Socialist Party.

## Our Collection of Quotes

### LOVE

*Finally it all boils down to human relationship ... whether I shall go on living in isolation or whether there shall be awe... Love alone is radical.*

—Howard Zinn, teacher, author, U.S. historian,  
white radical, peace and social justice  
activist

*Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word love here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace, not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth.*

—James Baldwin, 1924–1987, gay, African American activist,  
critic, and author of poetry, essays, and novels

*Even when we cannot change ongoing exploitation and domination, love gives life meaning, purpose, and direction. Doing the work of love, we ensure our survival and our triumph over the forces of evil and destruction.*

—bell hooks, 1952–present, African American  
critical thinker, writer, and activist

*Let me say, at the risk of seeming ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love.*

—Che Guevara, 1928–1967, Latin American leader  
and revolutionary theorist

*There are those who are trying to set fire to the world, we are in danger, there is time only to work slowly, there is no time not to love.*

—Deena Metzger, contemporary American Jewish novelist,  
poet, essayist, storyteller, and healer

*Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.*

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1929–1968, African American minister,  
civil rights leader, intellectual, social reformer, author,  
winner of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize, parent

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## CONNECTING WITH SPIRIT

*To my fellow swimmers,*

*There is a river now flowing very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who are afraid. They will try to hold on to the shore. They will feel as if they are being torn apart and will suffer greatly. Know the river has its destination. The elders say that we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open and our heads above the water: And I say, see who is in there with you and celebrate.*

*At this time in history we are to take nothing personally, least of all ourselves. For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt. The time of the lone wolf is over: Gather yourselves! Banish the word struggle from your attitude and your vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration. We are the ones we've been waiting for.*

—Hopi elders, of the tribe who emerged from the Third World into this, the Fourth World, in the Four Corners area of Arizona. The Hopi have been continual occupants of the area since 500 A.D.—the longest occupation of a single area by any tribe in the U.S.

*A dream or vision is one of the most powerful forces in the universe. Like any mighty energy, our visions can help or hurt us because they become self-fulfilling prophecies.*

—Jim Clemmer, Canadian author and workshop/retreat leader on leadership and change

*I believe that the future of the world hangs on how we can define the following two words: active mysticism. A mysticism that is not active will simply conspire with the destruction of the planet. An activism that is not mystical will not be wise or loving or strong enough to deal with the immensity of the problems that now beset us all.*

—Andrew Harvey, 1952–present, poet, author, teacher, and spiritual mystic

## HEALING FROM DIVISIONS: BUILDING A DIVERSE MOVEMENT

*For me, the healing path is part of our journey in xicanisma: a curandera heals herself first. She tests the herbs on herself first. She knows it in her body first. Then she begins to heal those around her. She spends years doing it. It is not always so linear, but concentric circles, spirals. Often we begin to heal our communities by attempting to bring structures back into balance—calling it civil rights—and we forget about ourselves and our familias. Now I see ourselves going into ourselves and healing in relation to our family, our friends, and our community. It is not egotistic, esoteric healing, but one of our communal circles. This is what it means to be healing women, community healers, to create the space for others to see themselves, to find their strength. As Zapata said, “People don’t need strong leaders, they need strong people.”*

—Patrisia Gonzales, founding member of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, author, professor

*We have to dare to be ourselves, however frightening or strange that may turn out to be.*

—May Sarton, 1912–1995 European American lesbian, feminist, writer of poetry, journals, and novels

*If you fear it, walk towards it.*

—James Baldwin, 1924–1987 gay, African American activist, critic and author of poetry, essays, and novels

*Malcolm X: The greatest mistake of the movement has been trying to organize a sleeping people around specific goals. You have to wake the people up first. Then you’ll get action.*

*The reporter: Wake them up to their exploitation?”*

*Malcolm X: No. To their humanity. To their own worth and to their heritage.*

—Malcolm X, 1919–1966 African American activist, spokesperson, nation of Islam leader

*All humanity is one undivided and indivisible family, and each one of us is responsible for the misdeeds of all others.*

—Mahatma Gandhi, 1869–1948, Indian/Hindu nonviolent spiritual and political leader

*If you’re going to hold someone down, you’re going to have to hold onto to the other end of the chain. You are confined by your own repression.*

—Toni Morrison, 1931–present, African American Nobel laureate, poet, novelist, and educator

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

—Herman Melville, 1819–1891, European American writer and traveler

*The greatest weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.*

—Stephen Biko, 1946–1977, South African founder and martyr of the black consciousness movement

*I shall allow no man to belittle my soul by making me hate him.*

—Booker T. Washington, 1856–1915, African American, educator, writer, and speaker

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*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us. We ask ourselves, "who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?" Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of god. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightening about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to manifest the glory that is within us. And as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give others people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.*

—Marianne Williamson, European American female, author, and lecturer  
quoted by Nelson Mandela, 1994 inaugural speech

*Every relationship of domination, of exploitation, of oppression is by definition violent, whether or not the violence is expressed by drastic means. In such a relationship, dominator and dominated alike are reduced to things—the former dehumanized by an excess of power, the latter by a lack of it. And things cannot love.*

—Paulo Freire, 1921–1997, Brazilian activist and educator, "father of popular education"

*We are the mirror as well as the face in it. We are tasting the taste this minute of eternity.  
We are pain and we are what cures pain. We are the sweet, cold water and the jar that pours.*

—Mowlana Jalaluddin Rumi, 1207–1273, Middle Eastern poet, mystic, spiritual master, founder of the Mawlawi Sufi order

## COLLECTIVE VISIONING FOR A POSITIVE FUTURE

*When I dare to be powerful...to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.*

—Audre Lorde, 1934–1992, Afro-Caribbean, self-proclaimed "black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet, writer, activist"

*Visioning creates passion. The clearer and more compelling the vision, the stronger the passion. And the clearer the vision, the more likely we are to hang in there during the inevitable downs, discouragements, and defeats encountered as we reach for our dreams.*

—Jim Clemmer, Canadian author and workshop/retreat leader on leadership and change

*Vision without action is a daydream, action without vision is a nightmare.*

—Japanese proverb

*It just seems to me that as long as we are both here, it's pretty clear that the struggle is to share the planet, rather than divide it.*

—Alice Walker, 1944–present, contemporary American Pulitzer Prize winning writer, a leading voice among black American women writers

## ACTION FOR A DEEP AND LASTING CHANGE

*Personal change is inseparable from social and political change. Intimate relationships cannot flourish under conditions of inequality and injustice.*

—Harriet Lerner, 1944–present, born of first generation Russian-Jewish immigrants, author, psychologist

*If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation are people who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand.*

—Frederick Douglass, 1817–1895, African American abolitionist and American hero, journalist, champion of racial and gender equality

*If you have made mistakes ... there is always another chance for you ... you may have a fresh start any moment you choose, for this we call “failure” is not the falling down, but the staying down.*

—Mary Pickford, 1892–1979, film’s first international star and philanthropist

*Giving kids clothes and food is one thing but it’s more important to teach them that other people besides themselves are important, and that the best thing they can do with their lives is to use them in the service of other people.*

—Dolores Huerta, 1930–present, Chicana labor leader, cofounder, and First Vice President Emeritus of the United Farm Workers of America, and mother

*You can not dismantle the master’s house using the master’s tools.*

—Audre Lorde, 1934–1992, Afro-Caribbean, self-proclaimed “black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet, writer, activist”

*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, 1901–1978, European American author, anthropologist, and scientist

*The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don’t do anything about it.*

—Albert Einstein, 1879–1955, mathematician and scientific genius, winner of the Nobel Prize in 1905

*Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.*

—Mahatma Gandhi, 1869–1948, Indian/Hindu nonviolent spiritual and political leader

*I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a “thing-oriented” society to a “person-oriented” society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.... America, the richest, most powerful nation in the world, can well lead the way in this revolution of values. There is nothing except a tragic death wish to prevent us from reordering our priorities, so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war.*

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1929–1968, African American minister, civil rights leader, intellectual, social reformer, author, winner of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize, parent

*There is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings. Some are guilty while all are responsible.*

—Abraham Joshua Heschel, 1907–1972, Jewish theologian and philosopher

*The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy.*

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1929–1968, African American minister, civil rights leader, intellectual, social reformer, author, winner of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize, parent

*There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world: and that is an idea whose time has come.*

—Victor Hugo, 1802–1885, novelist, poet, and dramatist, one of the most important of French Romantic writers

*For it isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it.*

—Eleanor Roosevelt, 1884–1962, European American, former First Lady and humanitarian

*When someone steals another's clothes, we call them a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who would clothe the naked and does not?*

—Saint Basil the Great, 329–379, Catholic, Bishop, and Doctor of the Church

*If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has his foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.*

—Desmond Tutu, 1931–present, African Nobel laureate, 1984 Nobel Peace Prize, Bishop of Johannesburg, former Secretary General, South African Council of Churches

*In the struggle for justice, the only reward is the opportunity to be in the struggle. You can't expect that you're going to have it tomorrow. You just have to keep working on it.*

—Frederick Douglass, 1817–1895, African American abolitionist and American hero, journalist, champion of racial and gender equality

*The suffering of Cambodia has been deep. From this suffering comes Great Compassion.*

*Great Compassion makes a Peaceful Heart.*

*A Peaceful Heart makes a Peaceful Person.*

*A Peaceful Person makes a Peaceful Family.*

*A Peaceful Family makes a Peaceful Community.*

*A Peaceful Community makes a Peaceful Nation.*

*A Peaceful Nation makes a Peaceful World.*

*May all beings live in Happiness and Peace. Amen.*

—Venerable Maha Ghosananda, 1929–present, Buddhist monk and the Supreme Patriarch of Buddhism in Cambodia, peace activist, nominee for the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize, winner of the Alternative Peace Prize



## T O O L S T O B U I L D C O M M U N I T Y

## Circle Closings

### RATIONALE

Allowing time to close at the end of each session is an important part of building community. Closings provide participants an opportunity to acknowledge the work that has been done. We have included a variety of those used by Circles.

**TIME NEEDED:** 5–15 minutes

### PROCESS

Ask participants to stand in a circle around a candle, your inspiration table, flowers, etc. Standing circles are great to do when you have only a few minutes since the group will tend to go a little quicker.

#### 1. Receiving and Giving Light.

Stand in a circle and ask people to hold their hands out so that both their thumbs are pointing towards their left (so that the right hand is facing down and the left hand is facing up). Then ask the group to hold hands, and point out that the right hand that is facing down is giving energy and the left hand that is facing up is receiving energy. Then lead the group through 13 breaths,<sup>1</sup> in which each person silently imagines bringing light to themselves, then to the group, to their community, and to the world. Each person can bring light to these areas at their own speed, so some people will have only focused on themselves and others will have breathed energy to the universe by the end of the 13 breaths.

#### 2. Gratitude

Stand in a circle and take the hands of the people to the right and to the left. Then ask each person to share something for which they are grateful. Or, play a song that is inspiring. Without words and in pairs, each person gives a gesture of appreciation to her/his neighbor, creating a different gesture on each move. Everyone moves around the room in this mood of appreciation until everyone has been appreciated, nonverbally, by everyone else.

#### 3. Appreciation Circle

Ask everyone to write their name on a piece of paper and place it in a hat. As each name is drawn, invite each of the Circle participants to offer an appreciation for that person. The individual who is receiving the appreciation can say, “Thank you, it’s true.”

Or, invite each participant to share one thing that they appreciated about their own participation, and then share one appreciation for another member in the group.

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<sup>1</sup> Because there are 13 full moons in a lunar year, the number 13 is considered magical in the Wiccan tradition. (The Gregorian calendar, which is based on the movement of the sun instead of the moon, calls the thirteenth full moon of the year, a blue moon.)

#### **4. Heart Circle**

Invite anyone who needs to speak to say what it is they don't want to take home with them. Move around the Circle, asking if any one else would like to speak. At the end, go back around the Circle and ask everyone to describe in one word how they are feeling right now.

#### **5. What Leaves and What Stays**

Have everyone symbolically place in the center of the circle whatever they are leaving with the Circle or anything that didn't get addressed and needs to stay in the circle. This is a good way to hear what touched people, as well as to recognize what needs to be addressed next time.

(Facilitators should make note of needs to be sure that they are addressed in the next gathering.)

#### **6. Closing Massage**

If you feel fairly sure that everyone will be comfortable touching each other, have the group sit in a line and give each other shoulder massages. Then have everyone turn around and massage the other person in front of them.



There are two basic approaches to outreach along a continuum of possibilities. At one end of the continuum, you already know a diverse group of people who want to explore building a collective force for transformative change, so you approach these individuals. At the other end of the continuum, you advertise broadly by doing outreach to all the groups and individuals you know are interested in these issues—so you send out lots of emails and post on multiple listservs. Most Circle facilitators have used a whole range of strategies. Choose the strategy that best serves you and your community and that helps you to build a diverse group. You may find it useful to figure out who to approach using the *Spectrum of Allies* on page 65. Either way, people who agree to participate in Circles of Change are committing a lot of their time and energy and appreciate talking to a facilitator in person or on the phone.

In terms of diversity, we suggest recruiting people who have a range of perspectives and backgrounds into your Circle: in the work that people do as political and/or spiritual social change workers as well as in the social identities they possess (ethnicity, socioeconomic class, spiritual or religious background, etc.). Not all Circles will have all kinds of diversity represented. Sometimes, Circles share a common identity (for example, an all women's group) and these can be equally powerful, as long as they are diverse in other ways. You will want to think about some commonality between participants so no one feels like a lone voice. Having at least three people who share something in common is a good guideline.

We have included a sample *letter of invitation* on page 104 and an *application* on page 105 that you can adapt to your needs. (In some communities, an application will help facilitators decide who to select if lots of people are interested. In other communities, written applications are inappropriate and it will require facilitators to talk to each applicant, in person or by phone.) Use the information about Spirit in Action and Circles of Change from the curriculum guide and send people to the Website, [www.spiritinaction.net](http://www.spiritinaction.net).

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Dear (insert name),

*Would you like to be part of creating collective action for social transformation?*

*Are you looking for a community that is diverse but shares common values and desires for building a better world?*

*Would you be willing to step out of your comfort zone and experiment with new approaches to individual change, group work, and social transformation?*

Spirit in Action invites people who answer yes to these questions to participate in Circles of Change. In these Circles, small groups of people from diverse backgrounds gather for 13 sessions with the purpose of building community, using and creating tools for social transformation, and visioning and planning for creating positive change. Circles engage participants' emotional, creative, physical, analytical, and heartfelt/spiritual capacities, and will be led by a facilitator who is supported by Spirit in Action staff.

We are inviting you to apply for a spot in a Circle of Change that will run for (insert dates and times). We are asking people to make a commitment to attending all of the Circle sessions, as this is vital to building the community necessary to doing the work. You can visit the Spirit in Action Website at [www.spiritinaction.net](http://www.spiritinaction.net) or call and talk with us (insert your contact information).

We are working to put together a group of participants from diverse backgrounds who share some common interests. To ensure this diversity and keep the group from being too large, we may not be able to admit all who apply to this round of Circles. We will be in touch with folks who let us know that they are interested by (insert date) to talk with them about their participation.

If this approach speaks to your heart, engages your mind, or seems to offer an opportunity to explore questions and needs you have in relation to creating positive change, we encourage you to consider becoming part of our Circle of Change. (If it is appropriate to use an application in the communities in which you are recruiting you can add that.)

In Peace,  
(insert your names)

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*Your Location*

*Your Circle Dates*

Please briefly answer the questions on the front and back of this sheet. If you would feel more comfortable answering the questions verbally, please complete the name and address section, check the box below, and mail the form to the address on the back and the facilitator will call you. If you would like an email version, just send an email to (insert email address) asking for an application.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (day) \_\_\_\_\_ (eve) \_\_\_\_\_ (cell) \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please call me to go over the questions by phone.

**What leads you to want to participate in a Circle of Change?**

**What are your hopes for the Circle and your participation?**

**What are one to three examples of your current or past work for social transformation?  
What work is closest to your heart?**

**Please describe briefly one to three of the gifts, skills, talents, and/or resources you could contribute to the group.**

**How would you describe yourself in terms of your social identity (race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, age, or religious/spiritual tradition, for example)?**

**Can you attend all of the sessions (insert dates)? Are there any dates you know you will have to miss? Which ones?** (If you have not set dates and want input from participants, you could ask them to tell you about the times they have available.)

**Anything else you would like us to know? Do you need any assistance to be able to join the Circle (child care, wheelchair-accessible meeting room, transportation, or environmental-sensitivity awareness, for example)?**

**Please return by (insert date) to:** (your address)

For further information, please contact: (your info)



## Beginning with People I Knew

from the Philadelphia Women's Circle

*I contacted 20 people; 15 were women I knew personally, and five were referred by friends. I found that trying to explain the project took longer than I expected. In hindsight, I would have told them to check out the Website first, then talked to them. I wanted a diverse group in terms of age, sexual orientation, race, spiritual practice, and social activist background. Out of the 20, ten decided to come to the group. The age range is from 22 to 58. The group is half white and half black. There are two Jewish members, two Quakers, one Wiccan, one Native American, one Catholic, and the rest have mixed spiritual backgrounds. All are involved in some type of social activism but are in different places with their activism.*

---

## Connecting with the Connectors

from the Berkeley Circle

*We definitely did not have a hard time recruiting people! We made phone calls and wrote emails to people we determined were "connectors." Also, it helped to advertise home-cooked meals! We only advertised for four days and we received 25 applications. We ended up accepting ten people because we felt like at least one person would drop out.*

---

## Holding onto Our Vision

from a Bay Area Circle

*As the time passed during our initial recruitment work we began to be somewhat discouraged at the slow response time and with the number of great people who were interested but could not join. We began to wonder if the group would get off the ground at all, and had to move our start date back one week to allow more time to do outreach. In retrospect we learned that recruitment required more time that we initially allowed in order for us to get the word out and to allow people time to respond and fit the sessions into their busy schedules. Another thing that emerged is that it was useful to spend personal one-on-one time with potential Circle members to allow them to ask questions and get to know us as facilitators. Our most rewarding recruitment efforts were when we went cold into meetings or gatherings, handed out our flyers, and talked with people casually. From many of the people that we talked to but who could not join our Circle now, we were able to establish a network of people to continue working with in the future. People were very willing to give names of groups, individuals, and communities that they belong to as an avenue of recruitment and potential collaboration in the future.*



# *Appendix*



## Resources for Supporting Circles of Change

The resources listed below will help you and your Circle in your reflection and learning together. Please contact Spirit in Action with your own suggestions for other resources and see our Website for additional resources. This is by no means a comprehensive list of all the books, articles, and films that have informed our work.

### OUR INSPIRATIONAL PEERS AND PARTNERS

These organizations have generously shared their tools and ideas with us.

**No Ordinary Time** is an organization that works primarily with young activists, artists, and faith-based leaders to integrate faith, spirituality, and reflective practice into social justice work. (Boston, MA: 617-661-9700)

**stone circles** provides resources and trainings to sustain activists and strengthen the work of justice through spiritual practice and principles. ([www.stonecircles.org](http://www.stonecircles.org))

**Tools for Change** is a multicultural organization that promotes healing, leadership development, and sustainable democracy. (<http://toolsforchange.org>)

**Training for Change** is an organization that trains individuals and groups around the world to stand up for justice, peace, and environmental harmony. On their Website they offer full descriptions of how to use many of their training tools. ([www.trainingforchange.org](http://www.trainingforchange.org))

**Women's Theological Center** is an organization founded in 1982 that does work on spiritual leadership, which it defines as the practice of living on purpose, in spirit, and for justice. (<http://thewtc.org>)

Appendix

### STRATEGY RESOURCES

#### Connecting with Spirit

Adair, Margo. *Meditations on Everything under the Sun* (New Society Publishers, 2001).

Weaves together a synthesis of three consciousness disciplines with guided explorations and 160 meditations on virtually every issue people might face.

Adair, Margo. *Working Inside Out*, second edition (Sourcebooks, 2003).

A classic guide to practical meditation techniques, that is now paired with an audio CD of guided meditations. Includes a wonderful section on using meditation to address social issues.

Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

Works to integrate contemplative awareness into contemporary life in order to help create a more just, compassionate, and reflective society. ([www.contemplativemind.org](http://www.contemplativemind.org))

Gottlieb, Roger. *A Spirituality of Resistance: Finding a Peaceful Heart and Protecting the Earth* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999).

Suggests that a spiritual life must be based in emotional and political resistance to unjustified pain.

Harjo, Joy. *A Map to the Next World: Poems and Tales* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2000).

Weaves memories, dream visions, myths, and stories from America's brutal history into a poetic whole.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama. *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999).

The Dalai Lama presents ethical guidelines that grow not from the particularities of any religion, but are grounded in the basic human experiences of happiness and suffering. Chapters explore the ethics of restraint, virtue, and compassion as well as issues of universal responsibility, peace, and the role of religion in society.

Horwitz, Claudia. *The Spiritual Activist: Practices to Transform Your Life, Your Work, and Your World* (Penguin Compass, 2002).

Written by the founder of stone circles, this is a practical guide to individual and social transformation through spirit and faith. Also includes wonderful stories and interviews with spiritual activists, and stories of Horwitz's work for spirit-based social change.

Hull, Gloria Akasha. *Soul Talk: The New Spirituality of African American Women* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2001).

Hull investigates the new spirituality arising among progressive African American women such as Alice Walker, Lucille Clifton, and Sonia Sanchez among others. She identifies the sources of this spirituality as being fed by three streams: 1) the heightened political and social awareness of the civil rights and feminist movements; 2) a spiritual consciousness that melds black American traditions such as Christian prayer and ancestral reverence with New Age modalities; and 3) enhanced creativity.

Ingram, Catherine, ed. *In the Footsteps of Gandhi: Conversations with Spiritual Social Activists* (Parallax Press, Berkeley CA, 1990).

Twelve informative conversations with renowned spiritual social activists, including the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Cesar Chavez, Diane Nash, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Gary Snyder.

*In the Light of Reverence*

This video shows the dichotomy between the way business, government, and the capitalist culture within the United States view the earth and the way in which Native Americans think about the earth. Exploring how things can be signified without having an object or commodity there to prove it, this video presents ways of thinking about the planet and envisioning its worth—integral to any movement. ([www.bullfrogfilms.com](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com))

Kyodo Williams, Angel. *Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace* (Viking Compass, 2000).

Presents Zen principles and how they apply to the African American experience. Also see Kyodo's Website for more resources and trainings ([www.urbanpeace.org](http://www.urbanpeace.org)).

Moreno Vega, Marta. *The Altar of My Soul* (One World, 2001).

Explores how living traditions of Santeria helped one woman journey from emptiness to overwhelming peace and joy.

Prechtel, Martín

Called from a Pueblo Indian reservation in New Mexico to Santiago Atitlan in Guatemala, where he eventually served the Tzutujil Mayan community as a full village member and became a principal in the body village of leaders. Prechtel instructed young people in the meanings of their ancient stories that took place in the rituals of adult rights of passage. He returned to New Mexico and now teaches internationally through story, music, ritual, and writing, helping people to retain their diversity while remembering their own sense of place in the sacred. For more information about his books and schedule visit [www.flowermountain.com](http://www.flowermountain.com).

Somé, Malidoma Patrice

An initiated Shaman of the Dagara Tribe of West Central Africa, who has been instructed by his elders to bring their indigenous wisdom into the world. Somé teaches people how to re-create the natural, old instinct in the souls of people and to reopen their eyes to see the sacred again, unhampered by modernism. *Ritual Power, Healing, and Community* is one of several books he has written that shares this wisdom. For more information on his books and schedule visit [www.malidoma.com](http://www.malidoma.com).

Starhawk. *Spiral Dance* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1999).

This important spiritual guidebook provides both the tools of ancient practice and the means to adapt them to our lives today—for, according to Starhawk, “a living tradition is not static or fixed; it changes and responds to changing needs and changing times.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

A Buddhist monk, peace activist, and author of over 100 books including *Being Peace* and *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. He teaches, writes, gardens, and works to help refugees worldwide, and he conducts retreats throughout the world on the art of mindful living. See [www.parallax.org](http://www.parallax.org) for information on his books, and [www.iamhome.org](http://www.iamhome.org) for information on his trainings and tours.

## **Healing from Divisions: Building a Diverse Movement**

Abdullah, Sharif. *Creating a World That Works for All* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999).

Abdullah demonstrates how we can change our world by changing our consciousness. Explores how to turn from a mentality that disconnects us to one that embraces the goals of restoring balance to the Earth and building community with all others. See [www.commonway.org](http://www.commonway.org) for more information about his work.

### *A Place of Rage*

A video by Pribba Parmar (1991), a celebration of African American woman and their achievements. Features interviews with Angela Davis, June Jordan, and Alice Walker and explores how women involved in the civil rights, black power and feminists movements affected real change. ([www.wmn.com](http://www.wmn.com))

### Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*

Interactive theatre techniques that can be used to analyze and explore solutions to problems of power and oppression. ([www.toplab.org/](http://www.toplab.org/))

### Class Action

This organization's mission is to raise consciousness about the issues of class and money, and their impact on our individual lives, our relationships, organizations, institutions, and culture, while supporting the development of cross-class alliance building and to support the movement of resources to where they are most needed. ([www.classactionnet.org](http://www.classactionnet.org))

### *The Color of Fear*

Internationally acclaimed film about eight men of various ethnicities who spend a weekend in Ukiah, California, engaging in an intimate and honest dialogue about race and the effects of racism on their lives and families. ([www.stirfryseminars.com](http://www.stirfryseminars.com))

### *ColorLines Magazine*

Published by the Applied Research Center with a focus on race, culture and organizing. ([www.arc.org](http://www.arc.org))

### Freire, Paulo and Miles Horton. *We Make the World by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change* (Temple University Press, 1991).

Horton, founder of the Highlander Folk School, and Freire, a Brazilian education leader, share their experiences of using participatory education in bringing about social change. Arranged in the form of a written conversation, it is based in their belief that a good education required three basic elements: love for people, respect for people's abilities to shape their own lives, and the capacity to value others' experiences.

### Harding, Vincent. *Hope and History: Why We Must Share Our Stories of Movement Building* (Orbis Books, 1990).

An impassioned call to the clergy, community activists, and educators to remember and keep alive the story of the black-led freedom movement.

### Johnson, Allan G. *Privilege, Power, and Difference* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1997).

A quick read for an in-depth understanding of race, gender, and, to a lesser extent, socioeconomic class and sexual orientation. Although Johnson is a college professor and uses examples from higher education, the information is applicable to each of us and our work.

### Kivel, Paul. *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice* (British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 1996).

This book draws on the tradition of white people opposing racism and helps make sense of the dynamics of racism in our society, institutions, and daily lives. It is easy-to-read, informative, and discusses key issues like affirmative action, institutional racism, political correctness, and the meaning of whiteness.

### Lappé, Anna and Francis Moore Lappé. *Hope's Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet* (J.P. Tarcher, 2003).

Presents a selection of movements and stories from around the globe. They believe that the daily choices that we make about our food have the potential to make positive changes in the world economy and in our physical health. And they have great recipes that might help you cook for your Circle!

### "The Listening Project: A National Dialogue on Progressive Movement Building" (Peace Development Fund, 1999).

This report, which gathered and analyzed the views of social-change organizers and activists about the current state of progressive political work, can be found on the Web at <http://peacefund.org/done/done.html>.

### Moraga, Cherrie and Gloria Anzaldua. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Kitchen Table Press, 1984).

This is a work of bringing-togetherness that gives the reader a clear-eyed view of life in the United States. First published in 1983, this collection is an important addition to the steadily growing voice of the world's silenced people, especially women of color. As Gloria Anzaldua puts it in her foreword: "Haven't we always borne jugs of water, children, poverty? Why not learn to bear baskets of hope, love, self-nourishment and to step lightly?"

Peavey, Fran. *Heart Politics Revisited* (Pluto Press, 2000).

A handbook for activists that suggests a pathway towards reconciliation and calls for living with difference through empathy, nonviolence, cooperation, and person-to-person contact.

People's Institute for Survival and Beyond

Training institute that provides not only community organizing skills, but an analysis, principles, and values that make these skills useful. Well-known for its "Un-Doing Racism" workshop that teaches that it is each individual's responsibility to dismantle the legacy of racism. ([www.racematters.org/peoplesinstitutesurvbeeyond.htm](http://www.racematters.org/peoplesinstitutesurvbeeyond.htm))

*Pink Triangles*

A 34-minute video with interviews, footage, and a diversity of voices on the realities and roots of homophobia. Made in 1982 but still relevant. ([www.cambridgedocumentaryfilms.org](http://www.cambridgedocumentaryfilms.org))

Rosenberg, Marshall. *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion* (CES National, 1999).

Resources for developing life-sustaining forms of communication and relationship See [www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org) for more resources.

Rosenberg, Marshall. *The Basics of Nonviolent Communication: An Introductory Training*.

This edited one-day training shows how we can communicate with others in a way that promotes authentic and shared connection enabling everyone's needs to be met. Two videotapes, three hours. Order at [www.cnvc.org/matvideo.htm](http://www.cnvc.org/matvideo.htm).

Stout, Linda. *Bridging the Class Divide and Other Lessons for Grassroots Organizing* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1996).

The founder of Spirit in Action tells her personal story and the story of the Piedmont Peace Project, which worked to empower a working class community to organize for jobs, health care, and basic social services. Provides insights and experiences with organizing across class and race to build unity.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race* (Basic Books, 1997).

Explores the psychological effects and causes of racism in the United States. The first chapter might be an excellent reading for your entire Circle.

*The Way Home*

This video is a collection of thoughts, stories, and ideas from many different cultures. Women from different cultural groups get together in Circles and talk about ways in which they are oppressed and ways in which they are privileged. There is a focus on individual experience and the similarities of different people's experiences within certain cultural and racialized groups. The video takes place in a collective setting and invites people to share their experiences almost as a spiritual healing process. The video also addresses the benefits of cultural analysis and what is lost through the Americanization of immigrants within the United States because of their lost culture. (World Trust—email them at [worldtrst@aol.com](mailto:worldtrst@aol.com))

Zinn, Howard. *People's History of the United States* (Perennial Books, 2001).

Tells true stories of U.S. history left out of many traditional history textbooks, chronicling movements of the Native American struggle against Europeans, the African American's struggle against racism, the women's struggle against patriarchy, and the workers' struggle against capitalists.

### **Collective Visioning for a Positive Future**

Anderson, Sherry Ruth and Paul H. Ray. *Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World* (New York: Harmony Books, 2000).

Stories of research on over 100,000 people in the U.S. that identify a large subculture that cares about ecology and saving the planet, about relationships, peace, social justice, and self-expression. See [www.culturalcreatives.org](http://www.culturalcreatives.org) for more information.

Berry, Wendell

If you and your Circle are not familiar with Wendell Berry, we recommend the following two articles in *Orion Magazine*: "A Citizen's Response to the National Security Strategy of the United States of America" (March/April 2003) and "The Agrarian Standard" (March 2002). Visit [www.oriononline.org](http://www.oriononline.org).

hooks, bell. *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (Routledge, 2003).

Essays on how teachers and leaders can lead discussions on race, class, gender, and nationality in order to create a beloved community.

Markova, Dawna. *I Will Not Die an Unlived Life* (Conari Press, 2000).

Twenty years ago, faced with a life-threatening illness, the author began a journey of rediscovery. This book follows her path to finding deeper meaning in life. As she points out, people can continue to feel powerless and live habitual lives—or they can make the choice to follow their passion.

Starhawk. *Fifth Sacred Thing* (Bantam, 1994).

This novel shares a vision of what a nonviolent revolution—succeeding within a violent assault—might look like. Linda Stout, founder of Spirit in Action, says "this novel made me believe that others shared my vision for the world."

## Yes! and Positive Futures Network

Positive Futures Network is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting peoples' active engagement in creating a more sustainable, just, and compassionate world. Many of these articles in Yes! will be great "stories of inspiration" to share at each Circle gathering. ([www.futurenet.org](http://www.futurenet.org))

## West, Cornell. *Restoring Hope* (Beacon Press, 1999).

Eight question-and-answer interviews, in which West seeks ideas for inspiring and reinvigorating black America. Politician Bill Bradley urges each of us to confront race in our daily lives; poet Maya Angelou makes the point that "one other word for hope is love"; and trumpeter and composer Wynton Marsalis discusses both music and the need to rebuild black communities.

## Action for Deep and Lasting Change

### Alliance for Social Justice. *Co-Motion Guide to Youth-Led Social Change* (1998).

Presents young people with the tools, skills, and strategies to work for change in their communities, including strategizing and action planning, research, campaign planning, organizing meetings, coalition and community building, making and meeting a budget, working with the media, and evaluation. See [www.allianceforjustice.org](http://www.allianceforjustice.org) for more information.

### Collins, Chuck and Felice Yeskel. *Economic Apartheid in America* (The New Press/United for a Fair Economy 2000).

Examines recent changes in income and wealth distribution, as well as the economic policies and shifts in power that have fueled the growing divide.

### *The Corporation*

More than two hours long, this extremely powerful film documents the rise and impact of the corporation. This film documents a collection of action we can take for a sustainable future. ([www.thecorporation.com/](http://www.thecorporation.com/))

### hooks, bell. *Salvation, Black People, and Love* (Harper Collins, 2001).

"The transformative power of love is the foundation of all meaningful social change," contends the author as she pleads for African Americans to embrace love as a force for change.

### Hyde, Lewis. *Trickster Makes the World: Mischief, Myth, and Art* (North Point Press, 1999).

Explores religious fables and tales as a method for understanding social change.

### Kim, Jee and Jeremy Glick, Shaffy Moeel, Luis Sanchez, Beka Economopoulos, Walidah Imarisha, eds. *Another World Is Possible: Conversations in a Time of Terror* (New Orleans, New Mouth from the Dirty South, 2002).

A collection of writings by youth about what they were thinking and feeling in the aftermath of the violence in New York City and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001. The contributors offer firsthand accounts, historical context, political analyses, and alternative strategies and solutions based on the primacy of peace.

### Lakey, George. *Strategizing for a Living Revolution* (New Society Publishers, 1987).

The Founder of Training for Change outlines his model and ideas for creating a nonviolent revolution.

### Moore, Michael

Documentary filmmaker who has made many films on contemporary social issues. We recommend *Bowling for Columbine*, and *The Big One*. ([www.michaelmoore.com](http://www.michaelmoore.com))

### Moyer, Bill. *Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements* (New Society Publishers, 2001)

Beginning with an overview of social movement theory, *Doing Democracy* outlines the eight typical stages of social movements.

### *Muslim WakeUp!*

Online magazine that seeks to bring together Muslims and non-Muslims in America and around the globe in efforts that celebrate cultural and spiritual diversity, tolerance, and understanding. ([www.muslimwakeup.com](http://www.muslimwakeup.com))

### *Peacework*

Monthly magazine from the American Friends Service Committee, with a focus on global thought and local action for nonviolent social change. ([www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org))

### Project: Think Different

Uses pop culture to change the world one mind at a time. By creating a whole new world of music, film, and video, PTD works to inspire people to tune into the world instead of zoning out. ([www.projectthinkdifferent.org](http://www.projectthinkdifferent.org))

### Prokosch, Mike and Laura Raymond. *The Global Activist's Manual: Local Ways to Change the World* (Thunder's Mountain Press/Nation Books, 2002).

Activists with the Boston-based social justice group United for a Fair Economy have written this toolkit for organizers who want to spur people to action.

### Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide

Provides training for grassroots leaders, provides movement building resources, and connects progressive activists with one another. ([www.projectsouth.org](http://www.projectsouth.org))

### Segrest, Mab. *Born to Belonging: Writings on Spirit and Justice* (Rutgers University Press, 2002).

Activist shares her reflections on everything from globalization to her own experiences as an antiracist, white lesbian in the U.S. South.

### Shaw, Randy. *The Activist's Handbook Primer for the 1990s and Beyond* (University of CA, 1996).

Demonstrates how activists for anything from the environment to AIDS policy to school reform can influence politicians and the media, form alliances, and take direct action.

### *Sojourners*

A monthly magazine with a progressive Christian voice, focusing on bringing compassion, community, and commitment to social action. ([www.sojourners.com](http://www.sojourners.com))

### Starhawk. *Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority, and Mystery* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1989).

An examination of the nature of power that offers creative alternatives for positive change in our personal lives, our communities, and our world.

### *Tikkun*

A bimonthly Jewish critique of politics, culture, and society. They offer many great perspectives on politics and spirituality. ([www.tikkun.org](http://www.tikkun.org))

### *Turning Wheel*

A monthly journal from the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. Focuses on matters of peace, social justice, environmental activism, and dharma practice. ([www.bpf.org](http://www.bpf.org))

### *United for a Fair Economy. Activist's Cookbook: Creative Actions for a Fair Economy* (1997).

This 100-page manual showcases some of the best media stunts, street theater skits, and creative direct actions from the labor and social justice movements. See [www.faireconomy.org](http://www.faireconomy.org) for more information.

## Films on Successful and Inspiring Movements for Change

You should be able to get these videos at many local libraries or through interlibrary loan.

### *A Force More Powerful* (Episodes 1 & 2)

These videos consist of six segments about different successful non-violent movements that have taken place throughout the world: the civil rights movement, particularly the sit-ins in Nashville, Tennessee; Gandhi's salt march challenging British occupation of India; South African youth organizing to challenge apartheid; Danish resistance to the German occupation of Denmark; union members creating the shift to democracy in Poland; and the defeat of General Pinochet in Chile. The different segments of these videos focus on the organizational strategies developed by the leaders of the movements and how developing a nonviolent approach to the movement worked to the benefit of its participants. (Films for the Humanities and Sciences, [www.films.com](http://www.films.com))

### *Bringing Down the Dictator*

Story of the nonviolent movement in 2000 in Serbia, led by young people, that took down Slobodan Milosevic. Narrated by Martin Sheen. PBS offers a companion discussion guide. ([www.films.com](http://www.films.com))

### *Fundi: The Story of Ella Baker*

Joanne Grant examines Ella Baker's contributions to the field of civil rights through video and firsthand interviews with both Baker and her colleagues a decade after the end of Baker's major involvement in the movement. ([www.frif.com](http://www.frif.com))

### *Seeing Red*

Explains how the Communist movement in the U.S. evolved and covers the events that brought the collapse of the movement. The movement contained a strong vision of how society could be different through the efforts of moving toward social change, and the steps involved in getting to that vision. The film shows there was emphasis on having fun, and how joining and getting involved in the movement empowered people. (Facets Multimedia, 1517 Fullerton Avenue, Chicago, IL 60614; [www.facets.org](http://www.facets.org))

### *The Veterans of Hope Project*

A series of six video interviews conducted with some of the most influential people to work with nonviolent strategies within the civil rights movement. The speakers share their spiritual connection to the movement as well as their involvement with organizing and taking action. (Veterans of Hope Project: 303-765-3194)

## **Facilitators' Tools and Resources**

Heen, Sheila and Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton. *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most* (Penguin Putnam, 2000).

An easily accessible, short book that offers advice for handling difficult conversations in a manner that accomplishes their objective and diminishes the possibility that anyone will be needlessly hurt.

Macy, Joanna and Molly Young Brown. *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* (New Society Publishers).

An inspiring and practical guide that moves us out of empathy and despair and into the healing we need in order to continue the work of justice for the world. See in particular Chapter Five, Facilitation and Sequencing Groups.

Minch, Holly and Kim Haddow, Laura Saponara. *Loud and Clear in an Election Year* (Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004).

A great resource for any social change group wanting to engage in communication work on their issues during the election year. Also available at Spin Project, [www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org).

Sandra, Jaida N'Ha and Jon Spayde. *Salons: The Joy of Conversation* (New Society Publishers, 2002).

This revised edition is packed with hands-on information about how to facilitate "group talk," including practicing the art of listening, helping participants learn brevity, remembering to stay lighthearted, etc.

Shields, Katherine. *In the Tiger's Mouth: An Empowerment Guide for Social Action* (New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, PA, 1994).

Guides you through each step of social awareness and activism, from determining what changes need to take place and how you can effect them, to how to approach listeners with bad news that they may not want to hear, as well as how to avoid burnout.

Spayde, Jon and Jay Walljasper, eds. *Visionaries: People and Ideas to Change Your Life* (New Society Publishers, 2001).

True stories of contemporary visionaries around the world who come from all walks of life (from crone to restaurant owner to sustainable business guru) and represent various faiths, races, ages, and income levels. This book can be helpful to Circle Participants as they come up with Stories of Inspiration to share.

### **Spirals Trust**

The work of the Spirals Trust has emerged from living and working in the South African contemporary context: they work to name those struggles and displacements of identity and to explore possibilities for journeying together in ways that facilitate healing and growth, using the expressive arts and creative participatory processes. (<http://home.imagnet.co.za/spiralstrust/>)

Whitney, Diana, Amanda Trosten-Bloom, and David Cooperrider. *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change* (Berrett-Koehler, 2003).

The model of "appreciative inquiry" has been central to Spirit in Action's work. This method encourages us to discuss, learn from, and build on what works well instead of focusing on what's wrong. This approach to organizational change is described in simple language.

**Action**—any act that moves us toward creating a more just and safe world for the future

**Activist**—broadly defined to include all those who believe a more just and sustainable world is possible and are willing to take action to create that world

**Affinity group**—gathering of people who share an identity or identities (i.e., a people of color caucus or a white, women’s affinity group)

**Community**—“The essence of community is to come together and become bigger than any one of us are alone.” (Sweet Honey in the Rock, March 2004)

**Culture**—the collective consciousness of a group of people; a set of invisible patterns that form the normal ways of acting, feeling, perceiving, judging, and organizing the world (from *Creating Culturally Responsive Classrooms* by B. Shade, C. Kelly, and M. Oberg)

**Diversity**—differences in people characterized by identity variables such as gender and sexual orientation, ethnicity and race, age, religion, native language, abilities, as well as by issues we work on, interests, perspectives, etc.

**Dominant culture**—the culture of the people possessing dominant identities, reinforced institutionally through laws, policies, and social customs. It is really the culture of those with power.

**Dominant identities**—those identities that are given unearned privileges institutionally simply because someone possesses those identities. (See chart on pages 115 and 116)

**Enemy consciousness**—viewing any living being as the “other” or as the enemy

**Excluded identities**—those identities that are not given privileges institutionally in the United States; the identities that people possess who are discriminated against by laws, policies, and social customs. (See chart on pages 115 and 116)

**Internalized dominance**—believing the messages that if you possess dominant identities, you are innately superior; acting as if those beliefs are true

**Internalized oppression**—believing the messages that if you possess excluded identities, you are innately inferior; acting as if those beliefs are true

**Movement building**—the process of bringing together individuals and groups for collective social change; movements flow from a coherent, shared vision, strategizing, careful organizing, convincing messages, effective use of the media and inspired collaboration

**Nonviolence**—holding the “other” as part of ourselves with respect and compassion; “at the center of nonviolence is love—if we must pick up a weapon—let it be love” (Sweet Honey in the Rock, March, 2004)

**Oppression**—the expression of a prejudice that is systematically reinforced by a society through laws, policies, and social customs

**Prejudice**—a set of assumptions about another person or group based on hearsay; prejudice is generalized like a stereotype about a group (race, gender, etc.) or about an individual (anyone who eats spinach is disgusting).

**Spirit**—connection to wholeness, to each other, to the earth, and to something bigger than our own individual selves

**Spiritual Practice**—broadly defined to include the variety of ways people connect to spirit, including but not limited to: walking in nature, taking a bath, meditating, chanting, dancing, drumming, reading and writing poetry, painting, going to church, synagogue, mosque, etc.

**Sustainable**—the ability to continue, encourage, and support our actions and our world for generations to come



# Talking About Power and Oppression

In order to discuss power and oppression across our differences, we need respectful language. The following is our attempt to guide you, based on the language currently used by groups to name themselves/ourselves. Language changes. Be aware of the changes taking place in your community. Language used to refer to groups can be awkward; people do not fit neatly into categories.

Please note: Individuals may not feel powerful or oppressed. This chart is not intended to define people's individual experiences, rather it attempts to name and locate groups (also referred to as our social identities) within the institutions in the United States where power is granted or denied to people based on their social/political identities.

This chart does not capture every identity. In a society that is built on a hierarchy of power, hierarchies are likely to be reproduced wherever there are groups of people. This chart captures the social/political identities most often privileged or discriminated against—historically and currently—in the United States.

Identity	Dominant Group	Excluded Group	Oppression
1. race <sup>1</sup>	white people	people of color, biracial people, and people of mixed-race heritages	racism
2. ethnicity	European Americans	African Americans <sup>2</sup> , Native Americans <sup>3</sup> , Asian and Pacific Islander Americans <sup>4</sup> , Latinos/as <sup>5</sup> , and people of mixed ethnicities	Eurocentrism
3. gender	male	female, transgender	sexism
4. sexual orientation	straight	gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, and transgender	heterosexism
5. socio-economic class	wealthy, upper middle class, middle class, and working class <sup>6</sup>	working poor, and people living in poverty	classism

Appendix

<sup>1</sup> People do have different skin color, facial features, etc. but race does not exist. It has been constructed to privilege whites and to exclude and discriminate against everyone else.

<sup>2</sup> People of African descent may self-identify as black, African American, Caribbean, African, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Some members of this group self-identify as Indian, American Indian, First Nations People; most prefer to be grouped according to national or tribal affiliations.

<sup>4</sup> Again, people generally prefer to self-identify through their nation of origin.

<sup>5</sup> Latino/Latina, Chicano/Chicana, Hispanic are all words used to describe members of this group.

<sup>6</sup> Socioeconomic class may well be the foundation upon which all oppressions rests. Being denied access to liveable wages and to resources is a familiar experience to people with excluded identities. Agreement about how to name each socioeconomic class continues to be debated. We have simplified it here.

<b>Identity</b>	<b>Dominant Group</b>	<b>Excluded Group</b>	<b>Oppression</b>
<b>6. ability</b>	able-bodied	people w/ disabilities <sup>7</sup>	ableism
<b>7. language</b>	native English speakers	bilingual/multilingual speakers	linguicism <sup>8</sup>
<b>8. religion</b>	Christian <sup>9</sup>	Jewish, Muslim, Wiccan, atheist, etc.	religious bigotry <sup>10</sup>
<b>9. citizenship</b>	U.S. citizen <sup>11</sup>	documented and undocumented immigrants	racism (xenophobia <sup>12</sup> )
<b>10. age</b>	adults	young people, elders	adultism, ageism
<b>11. size and appearance</b>	thin, beautiful <sup>13</sup>	fat, etc.	sizeism, lookism

## Appendix

<sup>7</sup> Sometimes called differently-abled, this group includes people with physical, social, emotional, and mental disabilities. People prefer to be seen as people first with reference to their disability second. The group for whom this might not apply is the deaf community, many of whom prefer to be located in their deafness.

<sup>8</sup> Coined by Dr. Sonia Nieto of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the term refers to institutional discrimination and the privileging based on native language.

<sup>9</sup> Christianity produces another hierarchy placing Protestants on top and Jehovah's Witnesses on the bottom.

<sup>10</sup> We don't have language to describe oppression against groups other than Jews (anti-Semitism) although religious bigotry clearly exists.

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, people who are U.S. citizens by birth, in U.S. colonies like Puerto Rico or Guam, are not seen as citizens; citizenship was created to privilege and protect white people of European descent.

<sup>12</sup> Xenophobia is the fear of people who are not citizens. The oppression is not specifically named although is referred to as racism.

<sup>13</sup> Definitions of beauty are defined by the culture of those in power. In the United States white people of European descent from upper middle class, and wealthy backgrounds define beauty and control the images of beauty that are imposed upon us through the media.



## Your Innovations and Exercises

*Spirit in Action is gathering the innovations of Circle facilitators and participants so that we can put them on our Website, making them available to others nationwide.*

*We will give full credit wherever credit is due.*

*Please send submissions via email attachment to [info@spiritinaction.net](mailto:info@spiritinaction.net).*

*Visit our Website to see what others have contributed at [www.spiritinaction.net](http://www.spiritinaction.net).*

### TITLE

### CREATED BY or BASED ON THE WORK OF \_\_\_\_\_

*Please write your name and anyone you need to credit. If your exercise is based on the work of someone else, please include information about the original source.*

### QUOTE OR STORY

*You may want to include a quote from a participant or a story from the Circle, one that highlights the importance or success of this exercise.*

### RATIONALE

*The rationale helps other facilitators understand why this exercise is important.*

*Check off which core strategy the exercise addresses (feel free to check more than one):*

- Connecting with Spirit**
- Healing from Divisions: Building a Diverse Movement**
- Collective Visioning for a Positive Future**
- Action for Deep and Lasting Change**
- Other**

### OUTCOMES

Circle participants will

- 1.
- 2.

*If we are clear about what participants can learn from the exercise, it helps facilitators stay clear. There is no need to explain what the participants will do; we capture that in the step-by-step process. Try to keep the outcomes to a short list. (More than two or three outcomes for an exercise are probably too many.)*

## **TIME NEEDED**

## **MATERIALS**

## **STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS**

*People who will be facilitating the exercise will appreciate the details.*

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS** *(if applicable)*

## **NOTES TO FACILITATORS**

*This is an important part of the plan; it will give some advice to others who will be facilitating, when to use it or not use it, variations on the theme, etc. In addition, this is where you suggest resources that you may have used to frame your thinking.*



*Spirit in Action*  
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