

## INTRODUCTION TO WORSHIP SHARING

Worship Sharing is not weighted down with all the baggage of Meeting for Worship. There is no one "right" way to do it. In fact there are several "right" ways and as you become experienced with them you may think up more.

Your worship sharing group should gather in silence, much like a Meeting for Worship but without the expectation that God is speaking through each speaker.

A). Your group will have a series of three or four questions. Take a few minutes to center down in silence. Read the first question aloud. When someone is ready, that person can begin. Each of you will have an opportunity to answer the question for yourself. Share your life experiences and what you think. There are no right or wrong answers.

B). Your group will have a deck of cards with questions. Take a few minutes to center down in silence. Someone should hold the deck, take the top card, read it aloud and then answer it. When that person is finished, put that card on the bottom of the deck and pass the deck to the next person. Each person will have different questions to answer. The deck of cards may circulate more than one time. (the group should probably have a set time to end.) If you get a blank card you may choose to 1) make up your own question. 2) Answer a previously read question. 3) Choose another card.

**WORSHIP SHARING IS NOT GROUP THERAPY.** No one is required to share anything. You should say only as much as you feel comfortable sharing. You do not need to explain your answer. If you do not want to share anything you may just say that you want to pass ( that way the rest of the group won't just wait and wait for you to say something.)

**RISK TAKING:** You will only get out of this what you are willing to put in. If you don't share anything important, if you censor your thoughts because they are too painful or too revealing, then no one will know any more about you when the worship sharing is over than when it began. You can't expect that anyone else will risk more than you are willing to risk with the group.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** What ever you share within the group stays within the group. Do not tell other people what someone else has shared. That person felt safe at that particular moment, with those particular people. Some of us have brothers or sisters or significant others active in Young Friends and might be sensitive about what is shared getting back to them.

**HUMOR:** Sometimes people say things that are funny. Sometimes they are very funny! However, you need to be mindful that too much laughter can make people afraid to share. Laughter can create a mood of frivolity and people won't share anything important. Most importantly, humor is sometimes used to cover over

something that actually is very painful. A several years ago at the George School Christmas Meeting for Worship a student shared a very funny story from his childhood that had the whole meeting roaring with laughter. As the story and the laughter continued, I realized that in fact he was sharing an incident of child abuse and that he had been the victim. I think that the story was much too painful for him to share as any thing but a funny story. It is also clear that most of those present weren't really listening to what he was saying or they wouldn't have been laughing.

**FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:** People will share what they want you to hear. Your "job" is to listen and give the speaker your complete attention. The question you ask out of concern to know the whole story may well feel like interrogation, if not to the person to whom you are directing your question, then perhaps to one of the other people. It means that you might "interrogate" them when their turn come around. They may feel it unsafe to share anything important.

**LEADERSHIP:** Someone needs to start things off. To read the question aloud. To make sure that everyone has had a turn and when people are ready to hear the next question. BUT we are all leaders. If someone is violating the ground rules each of us is responsible to gently remind them. Each of us is responsible for setting the tone for the group, taking risks, listening with full attention and being present with loving concern when someone is hurting.

**TEARS:** Sometimes someone will cry when they are sharing with the group. These may be tears of joy or tears from remembering a painful experience. Do not try to "cheer" them up or distract them with well intentioned support. The tears are not the pain. Simply sit quietly with them, hold a hand or give a gentle hug. Above all, listen to them and let them finish.

The following is a favorite quotation that describes the wonderful experience of real listening which worship sharing encourages.

Listening is a rare happening among human beings. You cannot listen to the word another is speaking if you are preoccupied with your appearance or with impressing the other, or are trying to decide what you are going to say when the other stops talking, or are debating about whether what is being said is true or relevant or agreeable. Such matters have their place, but only after listening to the word as the word is being uttered.

Listening is a primitive act of love in which a person gives himself to another's word, making himself accessible and vulnerable to that word.

William Stringfellow

For Worship Sharing group leaders.

**Please remind everyone in your Worship Sharing group:**

- First, go around the circle and share names. Please don't assume that everyone knows everyone else.
- Start with a period of silent centering.
- Allow silence during and after each contribution.
- Remember that no one is required to speak.
- That each contribution should be welcomed as a "gift."
- Try to be aware of the needs of each person in your group.
- Remember that everyone's contributions are of equal value.
- Respect confidentiality, what ever is said in the group stays within the group.
- Be serious but not somber. Too much laughter can make your group feel frivolous.
- Do not ask follow up questions.
- End with a group hug, or hand squeeze or what ever else seems supportive and appropriate