

**First Parish Church of Groton, Small Group Ministry  
Spring 2011 Session No. 8: Expression of Spirit**

Facilitator \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Supplies needed:** Chalice, matches, drawing/writing paper, art supplies, questions for the topic to hand out.

**1. Chalice Lighting/Opening Words:** 1 min.

Every human heart seeks meaning; for it is in meaning that our deepest shelter lies. Meaning is the sister of experience, and to discern the meaning of what has happened to you is one of the essential ways of finding your inner belonging and discovering the sheltering presence of your soul.

— John O'Donohue (2009-03-17; *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*)

While the soul, after all, is only a window, and the opening of the window no more difficult than the waking from a little sleep.

— Mary Oliver

We light our chalice for the ease of opening windows and discovering the sheltering presence of our souls.

**2. Check-in/Sharing:** up to 30 mins.

Each person takes a few minutes to check in. Invite people to check in by answering: *How is it with your spirit?* or to share a spiritual moment from the past week.

**3. Topic:** total time 60 mins.

**A. Introduction to the topic: *Expression of Spirit*:** 10 minutes

The late French Jesuit priest and scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin commented that, “We are not humans having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

Rumi: I am water. I am the thorn  
that catches someone's clothing ...

There's nothing to believe.  
Only when I quit believing in myself  
did I come into this beauty ...

Day and night I guarded the pearl of my soul.  
Now in this ocean of pearling currents,  
I've lost track of which was mine.

Mary Oliver:  
2012-03-28;  
*House of Light*

Is the soul solid, like iron?  
Or is it tender and breakable, like  
the wings of a moth in the beak of an owl?  
Who has it, and who doesn't?  
I keep looking around me.  
The face of the moose is as sad  
as the face of Jesus.  
The swan opens her white wings slowly.  
In the fall, the black bear carries leaves into the darkness.  
One question leads to another.  
Does it have a shape? Like an iceberg?  
Like the eye of a hummingbird?  
Does it have one lung, like the snake and the scallop?  
Why should I have it, and not the anteater  
who loves her children?  
Why should I have it, and not the camel?  
Come to think of it, what about maple trees?  
What about the blue iris?  
What about all the little stones, sitting alone in the moonlight?  
What about roses, and lemons, and their shining leaves?  
What about the grass?

Emily Dickinson:  
*1924 Complete  
Poems*

The body grows outside ,  
The more convenient way,  
That if the spirit like to hide,  
Its temple stands always

Ajar, secure, inviting;  
It never did betray  
The soul that asked its shelter  
In timid honesty.

“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 most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, 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 enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

— Marianne Williamson

## **B. Questions** (See the list on the last page)

## **C. Silence for Reflection/Writing/Drawing:** 10 mins.

Invite the group into 10 minutes of silence during which time they are asked to reflect on the questions. Participants are invited to use this time for writing and/or drawing their

responses if they wish. Coaches might wish to remind people that the skill of their artwork is not the issue here. They may or may not wish to share their drawings with the group.

**D. Sharing:** 40 mins.

Coaches invite each person to share his or her response, taking a turn as each feels moved rather than in a clockwise fashion. Give each person an equal amount of time to share. If there is time after each person has shared and very brief comments or responses have been given, invite people into a more free-flowing discussion of the theme.

**4. Closing words & Extinguish the chalice:** 2 mins.

W. S. Merwin:            In the morning as the storm begins to blow away  
“Just Now”                the clear sky appears for a moment and it seems to me  
                                  that there has been something simpler than I could ever believe  
                                  simpler than I could have begun to find words for  
                                  not patient not even waiting no more hidden  
                                  than the air itself that became part of me for awhile  
                                  with every breath and remained with me unnoticed  
                                  something that was here unnamed unknown in the days  
                                  and the nights not separate from them  
                                  not separate from them as they came and they were gone  
                                  it must have been here neither early nor late then  
                                  by what name can I address it now holding out my thanks

Sri Chinmoy:            Invite your soul  
“Invite Your Soul”      To enter into your mind-jungle  
                                  To clear it up.  
                                  Invite your soul  
                                  To enter into your heart-insecurity  
                                  To strengthen it.  
                                  Invite your soul  
                                  To encourage you in all that you do and say.  
                                  Your soul will inspire you,  
                                  Fulfill you  
                                  And  
                                  immortalize you

**5. Blessing:** 1 min.

As you go remember always to breathe deeply, walk deliberately, listen carefully, love constantly, live intentionally, keeping your heart and eyes open, grasping and savoring the moments as they float by like clouds. Go now in peace and celebration.

## Questions for Reflection: Expression of Spirit

*You are welcome to respond to one, all or any of the questions. And if none of these questions speaks to your experience, please create your own question and respond to that.*

How do you think of “Spirit?”

Is it “solid, like iron? Or is it tender and breakable, like the wings of a moth in the beak of the owl?” How do you know it in yourself? How do you see spirit or soul in others?

Do you know it as a “sheltering presence,” and if so, how?

What relationship do you discern between your body and your spirit?

Is there anything that keeps you from fully realizing your spiritual being or expressing it?

How do you experience that? How do you open to that being?