

**First Parish Church of Groton, Small Group Ministry
Spring 2012 Session No. 5: Learning from Failure ***

Facilitator _____

Date _____

* Based largely on the book *heart to heart* by Christine Robinson & Alicia Hawkins

Supplies Needed: Chalice, matches, drawing/writing paper, art supplies for drawing such as markers, crayons, colored pencils; questions from the topic session written on poster-sized sheet of paper or on copy paper or small slips to hand out.

1. Chalice Lighting/Opening Words (choose one or several): 2 mins.

For every time we make a mistake and decide to start again:

We light this candle.

For every time we are lonely and let someone be our friend:

We light this candle.

For every time we are disappointed and we choose to hope:

We light this candle.

— M. Maureen Killoran

"If you have made mistakes, even serious ones, there is always another chance for you. What we call failure is not the falling down, but the staying down."

— Mary Pickford

"Failure is only the opportunity to begin again, only this time more wisely."

— Henry Ford

"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

— Thomas Alva Edison

"Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm."

— Sir Winston Churchill

"There is no failure except in no longer trying. "

— Elbert Hubbard

Silence/Meditation: 1 min.

Let us sit in silence for a few minutes to help us set aside that which is not of service to us and to settle in to the present moment. (Ring bell to begin and end silence.)

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

Ask each person to take up to three minutes to check in. Invite them to do this by sharing their answer to the question How is it with your Spirit? Or as an alternative, Share a Spiritual Moment

from the past week.

3. Topic: TOTAL TIME 55 mins.

A. Introduction and Questions: *Learning from Failure* 5 mins. Choose one or more readings below.

Society gives us broad guidelines about success and failure: success as a certain kind of lifestyle, being unemployed as failure, and so on. Our parents and families give us narrower guidelines about success: what kind of degree we are “supposed “ to have or what kind of spouse is acceptable. While those definitions may haunt us, in the end, we must each define success for ourselves.

The philosopher Spinoza spoke of the importance of being able to see things *sub specie aeternitatis*: “under the aspect of eternity.” When we cultivate the ability to see ourselves in this infinitely larger light, our daily successes and failures won't throw us. Under the aspect of eternity, I know myself as a basically, but not completely, good person who makes mistakes and does not always live up to my ideals, but continues to work at them. Under the aspect of eternity, I know myself as one whose success is built on a foundation for which I can be thankful but not self-righteous. Under the aspect of eternity, I know myself whole, failures and successes together.

The question is not whether we will experience successes and failures, but how we will deal with them when we do. Will they, in the end, contribute to or detract from the growth of our souls?

— Robinson and Hawkins, *heart to heart*

Questions:

See the list on the last page.

Participants are welcome to respond to one, all or any of the questions. And if none of these questions speaks to an individual's experience, he or she is welcome to create their own question and respond to that.

B. Silence for Reflection/Writing/Drawing: 10 mins.

Invite the group into 5-10 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.

Optional: A five minute period to stand up, stretch, & move about.

C. 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.

5. Check out: 10 mins.

Encourage people to check out with a final thought or reflection about what it was like to reflect on the subject of the sacred earth or other thoughts or reflections about the session and how having done so might shape or impact their life in any way in the week ahead.

6. Closing Words and Extinguishing the Chalice: 2 mins.

To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends, to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others, to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.

— Bessie Anderson Stanley

7. Blessing:

May the efforts we have made here today
To listen with caring and compassion
Sustain us in the days ahead.
May these efforts bring peace into our lives
And into the lives of all those whom we touch.

May love surround us
May joy gladden us
May peace lie deep within
May our lives, and the lives of all those we love
Go well.

Questions for Reflection: Learning from Failure

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.

Thinking back to your childhood, what messages did you get about success and failure from your family, teachers, peers? Was there a specific person who was a role model for you in defining what success and failure mean to you?

How do you define success and failure at this point in your life? Have your definitions changed over time? If so, how? How have other people or events helped to redefine success and/or failure for you?

How do you deal with success or failure?

Considering your adult life, tell us about one important success and/or failure you have experienced? How did you respond to it? How did this experience contribute to your growth?

When are you most able to see yourself “under the aspect of eternity”?