

# For Orientation to Mission

## Group and Purpose

This circle process was created by and for a regional chapter of Pax Christi, the international Catholic peace movement that has sections at the national, regional, and local levels. Its Regional Council of 12 members meet each month to discuss policy issues and to plan events and activities that promote nonviolent peacemaking. Many of the group have been involved for many years and know each other well, while others are relatively new. While the group has a common emphasis on Catholic Social Teaching, gospel nonviolence, and peaceful alternatives to war and other forms of violence, there are a variety of issues on which individual members are particularly engaged.

The purpose of this circle process was to strengthen bonds among members of the group and foster deeper connection with the group mission. The goal was that, by creating a greater sense of belonging and community, the experience would enhance current engagement within the group, inform future goals and objectives, and ultimately attract new members, especially those who would increase the diversity of the group.

## Approach and Logistics

The circle experience was part of an in-person day-long retreat, and took approximately 2.5-3 hours (accounting for breaks etc.). A total of approximately 18 people gathered. The group gathered in a large indoor meeting room at a local retreat center.

In preparation, the circle process was briefly described to the group during prior monthly meetings, and it was introduced virtually during part of the meeting one month prior to the retreat event. For that introductory experience, which took place online, each participant was asked to bring an object that was symbolic of who they are as a peacemaker. A circle order was placed in the chat, and each person described what they had brought. This brief virtual experience gave some idea of what would be happening in person the next month. The goal of the retreat, and the emphasis on process rather than a product, was described.

For the centerpiece, facilitators placed a large green cloth on the floor, then added a Bible, a plant, a couple of wooden talking pieces, and other items brought by participants. Prior to the retreat, we asked each participant to bring a symbol of their faith, their connection to Pax Christi, or their work for peace.

*This sample circle outline was shared as part of Catholic Mobilizing Network's program, [Conversations in Communion: Parish Dialogues for Connection and Understanding](#). You can learn more at [catholicmobilizing.org/conversations](https://catholicmobilizing.org/conversations).*

## Circle Outline

### Opening Ceremony

[After a few moments of quiet:] Let us listen and reflect on this passage from the gospel of John: The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. [John 14:26-27]

### Check-In

Please say your name, number of years in Pax Christi, and a word or phrase that describes how are you feeling right now.

### Values

[Each person had been given a paper plate and a marker.]

On the paper plate, write one value that you want to bring to our circle; then share in the circle; then place your paper plate in the centerpiece.

### Guidelines

A pre-created set of guidelines was presented. We went around the circle so that each person could indicate their agreement to follow, and/or add or tweak the guidelines (or ask for elaboration) until all had agreed.

- Respect the talking piece;
- Speak from the heart;
- Listen from the heart;
- Personal information shared in the circle is confidential. Learnings can leave the session, but stories and personal information do not;
- Remain in Circle. Also, care for your body (permission/encouragement to stand or move respectfully in the room if needed.)

### Round One:

Tell about a person or event that first attracted you to the peace movement.

### Round Two:

[Each person was given a copy of the group's mission statement. Go around the circle with each person reading one line of the statement.]

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As you read and listen to the mission statement, what comes to mind from your own story or life experience? What connections surface for you?

### **Round Three:**

What is something you learned about someone in the circle that inspired, interested, or surprised you?

After this round of sharing and before the close of the circle, participants were given 15 minutes of “library time” to journal about ideas that arose during the circle. These could include reflections on the retreat itself (to support continued group formation), or ideas for future activities or actions of the group (to support the social mission), or to provide an animating vision (to support discernment of future goals). After the retreat, participants were invited to send ideas to the circle facilitator, who would gather and share them anonymously with the group in a future meeting.

### **Check Out:**

Please share one word or phrase that describes how you are feeling as we conclude this circle/retreat.

### **Closing Ceremony:**

A quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.:

Probably no admonition of Jesus has been more difficult to follow than the command to “love our enemies.” Some have sincerely felt that its actual practice is not possible. Others contend that Jesus’ exhortation to love one’s enemies is testimony to the fact that the Christian ethic is designed for the weak and cowardly, and not for the strong and courageous... In spite of these insistent questions and persistent objections, this command of Jesus challenges us with new urgency. Upheaval after upheaval has reminded us that modern humanity is traveling along a road called hate, in a journey that will bring us to destruction and damnation. Far from being the pious injunction of a utopian dreamer, the command to love one’s enemy is an absolute necessity for our survival. Love even for enemies is the key to the solution of the problems of our world... Our responsibility as Christians is to discover the meaning of this command and seek passionately to live it out in our daily lives.<sup>1</sup>

## **Outcomes & Learnings**

The circle process was successful in providing a space for participants to connect with each other. All participants appreciated the process and what was shared in the circle, though a

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<sup>1</sup>King, Jr., Martin Luther. *Strength to Love*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press edition, 1981), pp. 47-48.

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couple of people had expectations of some additional outcomes as well (e.g., a product, such as a plan). The following is a sample written reflection after the circle, that speaks to the success:

“The circle process gave me a better understanding of the other Council members: how they think; what they care about; and what is their relationship to the Church and their Catholic faith. I learned that some members were deeply concerned about the direction of the Church and the goals of Pax Christi, thus providing me with a more complex picture of them than that offered by the relatively antiseptic business meetings. I now have a greater respect for the motives and actions of my Council colleagues.”

### About the Circle Facilitators:

John Holden and Mary Beaudoin are parishioners at St. Camillus Catholic Church in Silver Spring, MD. This circle process was created for John’s ministry with the Pax Christi Metro DC – Baltimore (PCMDCB) Regional Council.