

CALL TO RELATIONSHIP IN ACTION

By Marta I Valentín

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MATERIALS

- Chalice, candle, and matches or LED battery-operated candle
- Cloth and any chosen decorations for the chalice table, such as stones, shells, or flowers
- [Audio file](#) of “All that You Touch (excerpts)” (10:37) by Rev. Theresa I. Soto
- [Transcript](#) of “All that You Touch (excerpts)”

PREPARATION

- Find some quiet time before beginning the session. Ground yourself in whatever spiritual discipline you practice, or simply take a few minutes to breathe and release your day and any associated concerns.
- Set out cloth, decorations, and chalice.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING (5 minutes)

Welcome participants. To include those who are new to the group, offer the Mutual Invitation model, developed by theologian Eric Law, with these words or your own:

Introductions begin with the leader, who holds power in the group. The leader introduces themselves, then gives away the power by inviting someone else to introduce themselves and to then invite another person to do the same. The process of self-introduction and invitation continues until everyone has been invited to speak. Today's self-introduction will include your name, what community(ies) you claim as yours, what brought you here today.

Invite a participant to light the chalice. Read these words, excerpted from a post by Carey McDonald and used with permission, or, invite someone else to read them:

March with millions! Take an action every day! Target swing congressional districts! I've never seen it like this before....The energy is wonderful. It's also overwhelming, because suddenly millions more people have realized that oppression is not abstract. It's in their face, feeling like a matter of perhaps literal life and death.

I'd like to encourage us all to stop asking “What do I do?” because this is not simply a matter of fitting the right political tactic to the problem at hand. We are living with the abusive reality of racism, sexism, jingoism, homophobia and transphobia unmasked, no longer bothering with the charade of polite company.

So rather than ask “what do I do?” we should ask “with whom am I in relationship?” You figure out which action to take by paying attention to who's doing the asking. This is not just semantics. Everything from your Facebook feed to your charitable donations flows from who you are comfortable with, who you listen to, and who's in your social network. Who you trust. What we need is more of us to have the courage to shift who we hear/see/know/understand/trust/love, and to allow the power of that relationship to change the way we live each day.

FOCUSED CHECK-IN (21 minutes)

Invite participants to take a deep breath together and sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Then, begin the focused check-in using the question, “What relationships are changing the way you understand yourself and the world at this moment?” Invite participants to respond as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while participants are thinking about the question.

SPOTLIGHT (12 minutes)

Share this short introduction to the audio:

The Rev. Theresa Ines Soto was ordained in 2016 and serves the congregation in Flint, MI as interim minister. These pieces are excerpted from a sermon she preached on January 22, 2017.

Play the audio. Distribute the transcript for those who may want to refer to it during the reflection time, or later, at home. If you are not able to play the audio, read the transcript aloud.

SILENCE (2 minutes)

REFLECTION PROMPTS (60 minutes)

Invite participants to reflect on the Soto sermon as well as the words from McDonald you used as chalice lighting words, responding one at a time as they are moved, without cross-talk or discussion. Use all three questions or choose one that speaks to the group and go into more depth with it. If your group is interested in finding out more about resilience circles, mentioned by Rev. Soto, refer them to localcircles.org.

- How does participating in the process of change affect the way you are living your life right now? Where are you trying—with other people and other forces—to co-create change?
- Who or what is a tonic for your depleted human heart and weakened human will that can point you in the “right” direction? Are you willing to allow yourself to be redirected?
- Resilience Circles, as Rev. Soto describes them, are small groups that gather for learning, mutual aid, and social action. To what communities (of any type) do you already belong that gather with one or more of these expressed purposes? What do you bring to those communities, and what do they offer you?

APPRECIATIONS AND LONGINGS (10 minutes)

Invite participants to take a few moments to quietly reflect on what they have appreciated about their time together and what longings they are left with, then share with one another in the group or in pairs.

CLOSING (5 minutes)

Share these words adapted from ones by the Rev. Gretchen Haley, used with permission:

*Though you have been warned
and given plenty of explanations
reasons to do otherwise
you have persisted
to claim a life of joy, and justice
to carve out this time
this space for the renewal
of your own heart*

*despite all the reasons, the resistance
fighting for your attention, luring you towards fear
you persist
to practice gratitude
for this day, this life
that has been given
this chance to begin again
and so let us gather in our communities, our congregations, our neighborhoods, and our homes
that we might
offer one another courage, strength
healing, hope
and this promise to
persist in kindness,
persevere in compassion
and
prevail in a life that is for more than ourselves.*

Extinguish the chalice.

My name is _____.

I am part of or claim these communities
_____.

I am here today because
_____.

ALL THAT YOU TOUCH

Faith Development, Adult Faith Development

Excerpts from a sermon preached by the Rev. Theresa Ines Soto at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Flint (MI), January 22, 2017. Used with permission.

The central idea behind this sermon today is a quote from Octavia Butler:

*All that you touch you change.
All that you change changes you.
The only lasting truth is change...
God is change.*

What is Butler talking about?

These particular thoughts—that the world can be summed up by the changes that occur around us, are included in what we would call both process philosophy and process theology. Okay? For a minute, though, I want you to imagine that you have a lot of space around you. You use this sometimes when you stretch and you take up all the space. I want you to imagine that that's the space you have around you right now... That's how much space there is for all the ideas, beliefs, and thoughts that you bring with you today, and we're going to have this specific conversation.

I want you to think of process thought as one of the ways to measure what happens in the world. The measuring stick in process thought is change. That's why people sometimes sum up process theology as the notion that not only does God change us, but we also change God. In that way, God isn't loved or worshipped. Instead, God is perceived, shaped, and ultimately the field or the ground of transformation. As people participating in the process of change, both changed and the changers, you become agents of co-creation with the larger forces at work in the universe.

A bigger question is this: How does being a co-creator of change affect the way you live your life each day?

A quote now from Amiri Baraka: "People did not send you to college so you could just drift off into the woods reciting Shakespeare; they sent you to college so you could come back home and help them fight. You understand that? ... to come back and help us— help your old parents who have been fighting all these years. Now it is your turn to come back here, with more information and the same heart that you had before."

I want to urge you with that same spirit. You don't come to this community and this congregation so that you can wander off into your daily life with happy quotes and sunshine feelings. You are here to prepare your heart to be a better human. You are here to prepare your actions to be the edge of creation. You are here to prepare your will to last for the long-haul.

The tricky part about the long-haul is that to perceive the future in the things you do today is a little confusing. People tend to use time as a way to break up the unclear future into measurable pieces. But it isn't always measurable for us how change works. What was the moment in which freedom to marry gained enough strength to be ordinary and not fantastical? What were the thousands or even millions of just acts that accumulated into the passage of the Affordable Care Act?

If time plus change equals new futures, how do you account for the change you want to see? Time brings change from the future into the present. Because the things you're doing right now, right now, they equal change.

I believe that no matter our specific political affiliations, we dream together and act together for a vision of beloved community that resists human degradation and disconnection. When I talk to you

about resistance from this pulpit, in no way am I asking you to choose between a donkey and an elephant. I'm asking you to say yes to humanity.

One of the immediate takeaways is that every moment counts. The moments when you care for yourself are resistance. They make you available to the greater purpose of your life. The moments that you care for your family are resistance. The people that you love and the people that love you pull you forward into that new future. The moments that you care for your community, whether you teach or do committee work, whether you offer refreshments or make music – these are resistance. You are the antidote to isolation. You are the tonic for depleted human hearts and weakened human wills. And, when you come here and your heart is depleted and your emotions are running sad, you come here. We are the ones who are waiting for you. We know that our possibility is greater for the future as we move together; we hold on to each other. We hold out for this possibility.

Rev. angel Kyodo williams [this is how she writes her name] put it this way: The work over time, with all due respect to Gandhi, is not to be the change we wish to see in the world but instead, to let ourselves be truly transformed. And then, by our presence and example, to become the catalyst for the transformation of others, and through them, eventually, the transformation of the world.

It's in the community, as a cell in a larger organism, that you are able to reflect the power and the possibility of everything we are together. Peter Block writes extensively on the nature of transformation in community. He reflects that, [t]o create an alternative future, we need to advance our understanding of the nature of communal or collective transformation.

Once, I observed two children playing in this way. They were playing together—one of them was playing house, the other one was playing grocery store. We laugh about it but one of the things that this reflects, is the way that individual self-improvement can work out. Towns full of people who have improved themselves, but have forgotten, at the same time, to improve their communities.

I want to take a minute and say that one of the ways that we give consideration to community is to build connections among and between ourselves. We have participated with a few small groups coordinated with monthly themes, but in the new year and in this time of transition, we are amplifying our efforts by changing the group to a resilience circle. A resilience circle has three purposes: learning, mutual aid, and social action.

Robert Putnam observed the health of communities and quantified it this way: He found that community health, educational achievement, local economic strength, and other measures of community well-being were dependent on the level of social capital that exists in a community. In other words, a community's well-being [has] to do with the quality of the relationships, or the cohesion that exists among its citizens, or, in our case, members. He called that web of relationships and their connectedness social capital.

Social capital is about acting on and valuing our interdependence and our sense of belonging. It is the extent to which we extend hospitality and affection to one another. If Putnam is right, to improve the common measures of community health—economy, education, health and safety, the environment—we need to create a community where each person has the experience of being connected to those around them and knows that their safety and success are dependent on the success of all others.

I've talked to you about this before and put it in a very simple way. I'm going to remind you, in case you forgot: All of us, need all of us, to make it.