

Convening – Cornerstones and Stumbling Blocks

Thursday, March 11, 2021

9:30 – 11:30 am

Standing Invitations

The Friday Fellowship practices convening skills grounded in commitments to curious inquiry, courageous dialogue, and creative responses to systemic challenges and injustices. Modeling and leading conversations that invite rest, reflection, reckoning, and relationship, Friday Fellows listen in as they learn forward together. This convening tool moves those gathered through an intentional process that remembers, first, the work of building relationships ready to hear, hold, and honor the work at hand.

Thank you for stepping into this convening with one another. Please read this full guide in advance and note adaptations made since Seminar One. As you find your way together, spend time exploring how you plan to move through these invitations. The floor is yours! *Practice makes possible.*

Session-Specific Invitations

Step One: *Calling In*

As we return, let's go back for one another: *Who are you today? Who is joining you?* Consider naming what it means to hold this particular conversation. *How much time do you have? For what purpose?* By way of introduction, consider lifting up your answers to one or more of the following. Before you begin, consider whether you will move around the circle or invite Fellows to speak into the conversation when and as they are ready. Please hold space until everyone has called themselves in. Welcome, Fellows!

*Who are you today? Who will you be in this circle?
How can others support your presence and participation?*

Step Two: *Centering*

When groups come together, especially those convened across lines of difference, hearing a shared invitation and holding space for quiet reverence sets a tone that carries. I encourage you to read the following aloud. Perhaps someone will volunteer. Perhaps you devise another way to hear these words together. After the reading, pause. Can you manage two or even three minutes of silence? *What might you hear in the spaces between each word?*

“Sticks and Stones: Another Story about the Buddha” (Jack Myers)

A young man set out on a life-long journey to discover the secret of how best to live. Collecting sticks along the way

he traded them as kindling in return for a morsel of food
and some advice on how to best live.

He collected baskets of stones, and to people's delight,
arranged them into graceful gardens of silence,
asking only for food and advice on how best to live.

Wherever he went, he traded in what wasn't wanted
For what went wanting, a stick for fire, a stone for prayer,
while the things men said about the lives they lived,
which led in all directions, allowed him to live many
lives.

He learned that each man regretted the prospect of death,
And thus, regretting how he lived, lived distressed by that
dilemma.

And because the paths they tread were paved with
complaints

No one could see how the young Buddha lived,
By feeding sticks and stones to hunger.

Step Three: *Core Values*

As you find your way back into conversation, will you meet this silence with the fullness of your own voice? It is time to call in the values you both bring to and anticipate from this convening. The list of P words has grown since we last met. It will keep growing, and you are always welcome to call in values not yet listed. As you call in a value that matters to you, consider its meaning. What does this value mean to you? How is it present in your life and community? Please share how you hope this value will be present in this circle. (Note: This is a modified combination of Steps 3 & 4 from last seminar.) If someone claims your chosen word or value, consider calling in the unexpected. *What needs to be named and claimed in order to proceed?*

Pacing matters
Pain matters.
Palpitation matters.
Pandemic(s)
matter(s)
Passion matters.
Patience matters.
Patterns matter.
Participation
matters.

Patriotism matters.
Pause matters.
Peace matters.
Performance
matters.
Permission
matters.
Perspective
matters.
Personhood
matters.

People matter.
Place matters.
Play matters.
Pleasure matters.
Poets matter.
Politics matters.
Pondering matters.
Position matters.
Positionality
matters.

Possibility matters.	Praxis matters.	Protest matters.
Postage matters.	Prayer matters.	Purpose matters.
Potential matters.	Presence matters.	Pushing matters.
Power matters.	Pretext matters.	Remembrance matters.
Practice matters.	Process matters.	Palpitation matters
Pranayama matters.	Promise matters.	
	Prophets matter.	

Step Four: *Conversing – Cornerstones and Stumbling Blocks*

With fellows called in, stillness centered, and values named and claimed, a conversation can proceed. Before you continue, take a look at the clock and balance the remaining time with the invitations that follow. *What will you take up together? What will hold to a later conversation?*

This seminar weekend digs into foundations under foot – yours, mine, ours. Before we get to the why, where is your here? Today, we tackle the relationship(s) between cornerstones and stumbling blocks. If, as Plate asserts, “stones, like so many religious symbols, can mean one thing and also the opposite” (44), what can we learn from the things upon which our lives rest and those that trip us up? What about things we resist? Consider moving through a selection of the following questions that resonate with you and your group.

What are the cornerstones of your life? What about your leadership?

What stumbling blocks keep tripping you up? Where do they come from?

Can you share insights from a moment or season when a cornerstone became a stumbling block or vice versa? What can we learn when the walls come tumbling down?

Step Five: *Clearness Check*

Convenings can deepen our awareness, challenge our knowing, and invite both individual and collective reckoning. As you begin wrapping up your conversations, pause. Can you quiet hearts and minds to reflect on what has been said and offered? Once you’ve held two or three minutes of silence, invite someone in your group to raise the following question. This is not a rhetorical flourish. Please hear, together, this cornerstone of our convening process.

Are we clear to close?

Being clear to close does *not* require consensus or completion. Instead, it signals a personal engagement with the fullness of a conversation. Often, convenings can bring up work we each have to do in our own lives. These learning and teachings are not reason to hold up a closing. Instead, if there are lingering questions that need to be asked or learning that needs to be named and deepened *with this group*, please take the time to honor unfinished business. If your group is not clear to close, sit with one another to name and honor what needs saying, hearing, and doing. You will not be able to step into substantive work at this time, but you might note if

and when and how the conversation needs to continue.

Please hold space for everyone to find their way to clearness before you pivot to closing.

Step Six: *Closing*

Much like a beginning or a return, a closing is its own work. *How will you exit this conversation together?* You might choose to end by speaking a gift or a learning into the circle. You might choose to lift up a question you will take with you. However you close, be sure to name and honor gratitude for time spent with courage and curiosity, and with intention and integrity.