

Reading Group

Opening Words

for chalice lighting by Ray Nasemann

We gather around this flame that symbolizes:
the truth we know
and the truth we seek,
the community we share
and the community we aspire to,
the learning that enables us
and the mystery that encompasses.

Here we speak the languages
of memory and hope.
Here we are welcomed,
our journeys embraced and shared.



Group Covenants

Welcome to the reading group. Over the last six years the regular members of this group have come up with a set of covenants, or agreements, which we will all abide by to help make this group a safe and pleasant space.

- We will all arrive by 7pm so that we are present for the opening circle. We will close by 9pm.
- We will start each group with a 'check-in'. This is simply an opportunity to go round the circle and give everybody a chance to say their name and a few words about how they are feeling at this moment or tell of any significant news that they'd like the group to know before we get on to the book.
- During the check-in, we will allow each person to speak without interruption, and we will listen to what they have to say without commenting on it immediately afterwards or starting a conversation.
- During the rest of the evening, we will explore the themes of the chosen book, in a spirit of curiosity and respect. We will each be aware of our own contribution, and allow pauses and spaces to arise naturally in our conversation, so that everyone has a chance to speak if they wish.
- There is always a 'pass option' so we can choose not to speak during the check-in or at any point during the rest of the evening's conversation if we would prefer not to.

The deeper intention is that these covenants will help us to create a safe space where we can all be in right relationship with ourselves, each other, and God (you may prefer to use an alternate word or phrase, such as 'the Spirit of Life' or 'the Universe', for what you hold to be the greatest good). Copies of these covenants, and more information about the thinking behind them, are available as a handout for you to take away with you.



Closing Words

for extinguishing the chalice by Burton D. Carley

Cheered by our community, blessed by our covenant,
uplifted in mind, and renewed in spirit, go forth
with courage and in peace to meet the days to come.

Amen.

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Background Information for Reading Group Session Leaders

Preparation in the month leading up to the group:

- **Read the book** you have chosen!
- **Prepare some introductory words.** This doesn't need to be complicated – it can be as simple as reading out a synopsis of the book to refresh everyone's memory – but people will generally appreciate it if you can do a bit more research and provide extra background information. Reading group guides can often be found on the internet and may give some different perspectives or questions for us to consider.
- **Remind others about the group.** If you mention the book in church or amongst other friends in the weeks leading up to the session then it is more likely that we will get a good turnout on the night.

Preparation on the evening of the group itself:

- **Arrive by 6.45pm** if you can to set out a small table and circle of about eight chairs in the library.
- **Bring a small candle and matches** or ask someone with an office key to find one in the church for you.
- **Fetch a jug of water and glasses** from the church kitchen (or enlist the help of someone else to do so).
- **Put a notice in the lobby** or on the front door so that newcomers know how to get in and where to go.
- **Be prepared to welcome latecomers** by keeping the entryphone switched on and having someone ready to go upstairs and let people in (not the main session leader who will be busy running the group).

The simple structure of each group is as follows:

- **Start the session at 7pm** with the usual opening words and lighting of the chalice candle.
- **Welcome everyone and read through the covenants** in full (every time!)
- **Introduce the check-in** and make sure newcomers understand what is expected.
- **Give your own introduction to the selected book** and then open up conversation to the whole group.
- **Keep aware of the group dynamics.** If someone is dominating proceedings and others are not getting a chance to speak then it might be helpful for you to gently steer the conversation so that everyone gets an opportunity to say something. One way to do this may be to wait until there is a gap, then offer a general invitation for anyone who has not yet spoken to have their say, if they would like to. However, it is important to remember that this is only an invitation and not an obligation, as some people may wish to remain silent, and might feel uncomfortable if they were 'put on the spot'. Remember the pass option.
- **Sense when it is time to bring the group to a close.** When the conversation is flagging, allow a little pause before asking people if they've any more to add before we finish off. It is perfectly OK to finish early if the energy has run out, but sometimes it is worth hanging in there, as the conversation may move to a deeper level after what appears to be a 'lull'. Also, apparent digressions can sometimes be very rich and fruitful, so there's no need to hurry the conversation back on topic if it is wandering.
- **When the conversation has run out** we can finish the evening with a reminder of the forthcoming book choices and meeting dates. From time to time we will also discuss future plans and the selection rota.
- **Read the closing words** before you pack up and put the chairs away.