



# Covenants of Presence

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1. **Be fully present, extended and presume welcome.** Set aside the usual distractions of things undone from yesterday, things to do tomorrow. Welcome others into this space and presume you are welcome as well.
2. **Listen generously.** Listen intently to what is said; listen to the feelings beneath the words. As Quaker Douglas Steere writes, “To *listen* another’s soul into life, into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest gift we can offer to another.”
3. **Author your story.** We all have a story. Some might say, “I don’t have a story” or “a story worth telling,” but you do. You must claim authorship and learn to tell it to others.
4. **We come as equals.** We don’t have the same gifts and graces, but no person’s gifts and graces are more or less important than another’s.
5. **It is never “share or die”.** You will be invited to share stories in pair and in a large group. The invitation is exactly that. *You* will determine the extent to which you want to participate.
6. **No fixing.** We are not here to set someone else straight, right a wrong, or provide therapy. We are here to witness God’s presence and movement in the sacred stories we share.
7. **Suspend judgement.** Set aside your judgements. By creating a space between judgements and reactions, we can listen to another person, and to ourselves, more fully.
8. **Turn to wonder.** If you find yourself becoming judgmental, cynical or certain about what you know, try turning into wonder: “I wonder why she shared that story or made those choices?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me.” “I wonder how my story connects to their stories.”
9. **Hold these stories with care.** There are many people who will benefit from the stories they hear during our time together. Imagine hearing another as you would listen to scripture—attentively, mindfully and open to the holy.
10. **Be mindful and respect time.** We all have something important to share and the spiritual discipline of time invites us to focus and make particular choices about what to share and how much to share. It also helps us to create the space.
11. **Practice confidentiality care.** We create a safe space by respecting the nature and content of the stories heard. If anyone asks that a story shared be kept in confidence, the group will honor that request.
12. **Believe that it is possible for us to emerge from our time together as refreshed, surprised and less burdened than we came.** Believe that this time can provide renewal, refreshment and possibilities; that seeds planted here will bloom in time to come.

\*Adopted from Touchstones used in The Center for Courage and Renewals Circle of Trust retreats