

## **RCWP-USA (National)<sup>1</sup> Compassion Circle Policy and Protocol**

**Accepted on February 5th, 2018**

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<sup>1</sup> Please note the use of *national* throughout the policy is to differentiate the RCWP-USA Compassion Circle policy from any regional Compassion circle policy.

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**Statement:**

The national Compassion Circle provides assistance in addressing and bringing conflict to resolution. If, after a period of time, individuals, regions, circles and communities are unable to resolve conflict themselves, they may reach out to the national Compassion Circle for help. This Circle of deep listening, compassionately works through an outlined model and process to come to a resolution.

**Rationale: National Compassion Circle to address and resolve conflict.**

Based on the Gospel our RCWP servant leadership to the people of GOD is deeply committed to the manifold aspects of communion and community wherever we find ourselves.

The community of RCWP (and every community) reflects the Creator's life-giving diversity and the eternal longing for Oneness which we commit to celebrate responsibly among ourselves and the communities we serve.

To walk a common path to unity harmoniously is not easy. From diversity conflicts may arise even among people committed to love and peace. Conflicts are often opportunities for individuals and groups to deepen their understanding not only of self and one another but also of the enriching dynamics of diversity which enhance and strengthen community and common union.

The resolution of conflict is healing and adds to life. Unresolved conflict stifles and restricts life and may bring harm to individuals and the communities to which they belong.

Members of RCWP, as responsible servant leaders, (individually and as a group) are called to acknowledge and contain, reduce and/or heal harm that arises from unresolved conflict between individuals and/or communities they serve.

As RCWP, a public and visible new representation of the people of GOD, it is important that we demonstrate our willingness and responsibility to add to the healing of the world by effectively resolving conflicts within and among ourselves and our communities instructed by compassion, justice and longing for unity that confirms and creates anew communion with GOD.

## **Use of the National Compassion Circle**

Conflict is to be addressed first at the local and regional level by utilizing personal prayer and discernment, dialogue with a trusted support person, and use of a regional Compassion Circle. When an issue of conflict remains unresolved after these efforts have been exhausted, the national Compassion Circle is the next step to assist in addressing and resolving the conflict.

*“We are radically unfinished yet filled with stunning grace.”*

*Urgings of the Heart*, p. 62 (adapted)  
Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon

**Below is the model and process to engage the RCWP National Compassion Circle.**

**Steps:**

1. Any person dealing with conflict can contact the designated national Compassion Circle coordinator. (See page 14 for contact information).
2. The designated coordinator will inform the national Compassion Circle facilitators and a meeting will be scheduled with at least two facilitators and the person or persons<sup>2</sup> involved. Meetings will ideally be face to face. A Skype session may be used when meetings are not possible.
3. The national Compassion Circle model and method will include a plan with a timeline. Preparations, including a written non-judgmental narrative to name the conflict, meeting(s), transformation or decision making, follow up and timeline are components of the process of the national Compassion Circle. A reflective, compassionate conversation is used throughout the process. (The model and method are detailed on pages 6-9).
4. The process will take no longer than 6 months. Person(s) in conflict must agree to the outlined process for dealing with their conflict. They will develop and sign a written agreement at the end of the process. The national Compassion Circle process and recommendations are confidential and that standard will be adhered to by the facilitators and the coordinator.
5. If, after all efforts have been exhausted and the conflict has still not come to resolution, the national Compassion Circle facilitators involved will make concrete recommendations to the person(s) involved for next steps and consequences.

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<sup>2</sup> All references to person or persons indicate the National Compassion Circle's genuine desire to address both intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict.

## Model: Compassionate and Reflective Conversation<sup>3</sup>

Compassionate and reflective conversation is a model and method that invites personal and communal growth and decision making through the practice of reflective engagement. Commitment to the process, prayerful preparation, deep compassionate listening, honest dialogue and openness to change are essential elements of this conversation.

Reflective conversation depends on a **method of engagement** and includes:

### **Attending**

The conversation engages us in a **process** of interpretation.

Attentiveness to the experience of the process of interpretation reveals continuous movement.

### **Asserting**

Asserting our own perspective.

### **Responding**

Willingness to listen and engage another's perspective.

We come with: **Presuppositions**

Together we undertake: **Critical Inquiry**

We move toward: **Personal discovery, mutual transformation and healing**

This method fosters and depends on an ability and willingness to live deeply and attentively and to:

- Access our experience
- Risk self disclosure
- Listen deeply, presuming that the other's experience may be offering us a path toward truth
- Suspend judgment
- Assert our own perspective honestly
- Hear and accept difference
- Tolerate ambiguity
- Exhibit a willingness to compromise and change

The fruits of this process include:

- \* Realizing and engaging the revelatory quality of our human experience
- \* Appropriating the power of our Christian tradition
- \* Increased awareness of our interconnectedness
- \* Deepened awareness of GOD's action in us as individuals and as community
- \* Being drawn more deeply into the sacred wisdom of the circle

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<sup>3</sup>Developed from Sacred listening into compassionate conflict resolution, RCWP Eastern region. Developed from the outline for a Compassion circle RCWP Western region. Developed from revised and updated Model and method for theological, reflective conversation (2001). Developed from the works of James Whitehead & Evelyn Whitehead (1995) and Patricia O'Connell Killen & John DeBeer (1995), Paul Ricoeur, Sandra Schneiders.

## Process

### Preparation:

Once the national Compassion Circle has been contacted and the facilitators selected to engage in the process, they will reach out to the person(s) in conflict to begin the process. Person(s) in conflict will be asked to take time to reflect on their conflict and then write a non-judgmental narrative of the conflict. This requires honest and prayerful discernment of what the conflict is really about. They may well discover more than one incident. They are encouraged to write as many additional non-judgmental narratives concerning the conflict as are needed.

Attempt to name the issue(s), both surface and underlying ones.

Write an event regarding the conflict. What happened to you: giving as much detail as possible.

Describe who, what, where, how, when, and what you saw, smelled, heard, felt, thought and did during the event.

Do not explain or ask why or evaluate your experience as you write.

Lay the writing aside, without editing, until you bring it to the National Compassion Circle.

You will be asked to read your narrative(s) to the national Compassion Circle.

### Attending

As we gather in the Circle we will light a candle, spend a few minutes in silent prayer and have a participant read the national Compassion Circle rationale (see page 3) and conclusion (see page 11). Seeking all information available to us<sup>4</sup> each person will take turns to talk about their experience of the conflict by reading their own non-judgmental narrative. All others listen while suspending judgment. There will be a few moments of silence between hearing the perspectives.

### Assertion

We turn our attention to mutual clarifications of each perspective. This is a time for dialogue. Clarification is part of the dialogue between us. We will use direct and clear communication including the use of I-statements to communicate our thoughts and feelings, paraphrasing to re-phrase what we hear another saying, and the use of specific phrases concerning our own experience. This communication will be introduced, modeled and coached by the facilitators throughout the process. Here we need to have the courage to share our perspective, listen deeply, and have a willingness to recognize difference. Now we engage the Christian tradition, the culture and our human experience thus widening our perspectives concerning the conflict. (See page 10 for the three components of reflective conversation. These components are meant as springboards to further personal and communal reflection and conversation).

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<sup>4</sup> References to us, we, our and together indicate all of the national Compassion Circle participants.

## Responding

It is important to move from our shared clarifications, listening and dialogue toward compromise, discovery of new insights for future needs and/or resolution.

- Identify what we can agree on. Is there common ground in this conflict?
- Touch into humility. This requires the maturity to admit that we sometimes fail to live up to the Gospel. Can we take ownership of our part of the conflict? Without compromising our integrity, is there something we can each say or do to move toward resolving the conflict?
- Recognize that GOD is calling us to be transformed through this conflict. Transformation is a GOD-moment and is a redemptive aspect of the struggle of conflict.
- Together engage in discernment for a possible response, evaluation, agreement, and/or planning further action.

*"The Spirit's creative power works within us not demanding perfection but desiring that we become whole."*

*Urgings of the Heart*, p. 62 (adapted)  
Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon

One facilitator will take handwritten notes during the process. This will serve as a concrete reminder of the process and as a reminder to enable all participants to continue if there are subsequent meetings. (All notes will be destroyed by a facilitator at the completion of each national Compassion Circle process). Persons in conflict can now begin to articulate their own needs. We may well discover new questions, an emerging action, or new understanding that can move us toward resolution and healing from our conflict. Perhaps forgiveness and reconciliation become possibilities.

*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as God has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

*Colossians 3: 12-13*  
NRSV

Each person in conflict will begin to articulate what their own needs are in order for this particular conflict to be addressed and transformed for them. Then together they will create a statement of agreement listing how they might continue to work on addressing, transforming and healing in the future. Persons will sign this written agreement and be given a copy to keep.



There will be a follow-up phone call to each person from a facilitator within one week of each meeting to answer any additional questions or concerns and to check on general well-being.

The national Compassion Circle process for this conflict will draw to a close with a ritual celebrating each person's courage and willingness to engage in this healing process. This is a time to celebrate GOD's healing and compassionate presence throughout the process.

*I urge Euodia and I urge Synchete to come to an agreement with one another in Christ Jesus. And I ask you also, my loyal companion to help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the Gospel together with the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

*Paul's letter to the Philippians 4:2-3, (adapted)*  
NRSV

If the conflict remains unresolved after three meetings, the national Compassion Circle will engage a decision making process<sup>5</sup> in an attempt to stop the hurt and break through possible entrenchment. Professional mediation may be necessary to address an ongoing unresolved conflict. Where there are deeper issues of abuse, mental illness, drug or alcohol abuse indicated, professional mental health services will be recommended. A timeline will be implemented. The consequences of ignoring the national Compassion Circle recommendations will be clearly communicated to the person(s) in conflict. The consequences of violations of RCWP-USA ethical standards will be explicitly communicated.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>The decision making process will include the national Compassion Circle facilitators' recommending concrete steps for conflicted person(s) to follow, including a timeline in the event that conflict transformation is not reached.

<sup>6</sup> Please refer to your copy of the signed statement indicating your agreement to follow the Code of Ethics in the RCWP-USA Constitution. Consequences for failure to adhere to the principles of the Code of Ethics are explicitly stated in this signed statement.

### **Three components of reflective conversation**

#### **Experience**

We each have our own unique way of responding in the world. Our past shapes who we are and our human experience informs our faith and how we live in the world. The ability to reflect on our experience concerns our spirituality. Listening to our experience includes paying attention to our bodily feelings, our thoughts, fantasies, imagination, beliefs, values, convictions, etc. Rather than diagnosing conflict as a problem, women can often experience conflict as an absence of wholeness, a deep disturbance of being out of harmony. Women have long been considered the caretakers of others. We are sensitive to the needs of others yet this can make it difficult to acknowledge our own needs. Difference is suspect between us and can create conflict when individually we attempt to take a stand. Envy, competition, anger and jealousy not addressed among us can create even deeper conflict. Past abuse, neglect and/or trauma impact us and our relationships. Others can sometimes stir responses in us that are misunderstood and create difficulty in our relationships. We may unconsciously project mistaken identities, motives and intent onto others. Obviously each one of us needs to be listened to, respected and taken seriously.

**The Christian tradition** offers us insight into GOD's relationship with/in the world. This tradition includes: Scripture, the saints, popular piety, multiple theologies, sacraments, liturgy, etc. While the tradition guides our Christian lives it is also open to interpretation and critique. Jesus spoke with authority rooted in love, understanding and compassion for all people. Unlike authoritarianism and bullying that seek to control the actions of others we recognize that GOD's authority rooted in this same love, understanding and compassion are within each of us. Individually we each have a part of the truth, and yet the truth is to be found most completely within the larger community. Considering both the good of the self and the good of the community in resolving conflict requires both a moral and an empathic stance.

#### **Culture**

Each person is culturally formed and informed. Culture functions largely outside of our awareness. We bring culture to the conversation just as we bring our own unique psychology and spirituality. Being a woman in our culture brings with it certain painful realities. Race, ethnicity, sexual identity and/or orientation, economic status, age and physical impairment put us at greater risk for discrimination and maltreatment. Valerie Saiving's essay (1960) concerning women, has gifted us with some invaluable insights. She describes women's inclination as an outcome of their crucial ability to suspend their own needs in deference to others' needs. This strength can also foster distractedness, triviality, gossip, deferring to others, inability to respect other's boundaries and even diffuseness of purpose. These ways of functioning can lead to conflict as a consequence. Bullying, the will to power over others, creates conflict and painful interactions among us if left unaddressed. Bullying is violence and needs to be confronted. Bullying contributes negatively to our culture in ever increasing ways. Language also forms and shapes our lives and relationships. We need to pay attention to the words we use and how we use them. Clear communication between us enhances our relationships and fosters sharing of ideas, thoughts and feelings.

## Conclusion

Disagreement and conflict are normal parts of life. They are to be expected. However, unresolved conflict can damage individuals as well as relationships between individuals and groups. Unresolved conflict between individuals can stifle collaboration. For those of us who profess to be followers of Christ, it is vital that conflict be addressed in life-giving ways that can lead to healing and the restoration of relationship.

RCWP-USA encourages its members to make use of the national Compassion Circle and its method of compassionate and reflective conversation in the event that conflict within, between individuals, and/or groups cannot be resolved at the local or regional level. While the outcome cannot be guaranteed, when the conflicting person(s) enter into this process with humility, respect and openness there is great potential for conflict to be resolved and for each person to become more whole.

*"All conflict is an invitation to evolve."*

*The way of conflict, 2004*

Deidre Combs

## National Compassion Circle Description

- Ideally the national Compassion Circle will have two trained facilitators from each of RCWP's regions. The national Compassion Circle will have a designated contact/coordinator with name and contact information readily available to RCWP-USA.
- Anyone wishing to use the services of the national Compassion Circle may contact the designated Circle coordinator who in turn will contact at least two facilitators<sup>7</sup> of the Circle to meet with the person or persons in conflict at an agreed upon date, time and location. This location needs to be selected to accommodate all participants in terms of distance. If a face to face meeting is not possible then the contact person will set up a Skype call at an agreed upon date and time.
- It is important that the national Compassion Circle facilitators do not have close relationships with the person or persons in conflict. Ideally this means that those in conflict and the Circle facilitators are not members of the same region.
- All facilitators will be required to engage in training to be active in the national Compassion Circle. Standards of confidentiality, a thorough knowledge of the RCWP code of ethics, and the willingness to travel are requirements for facilitators. Modeling clear and direct communication skills, empathy, providing a less anxious presence and a safe space for person(s) to engage the process are also essential. Preparation to understand and use the model and the process will create an environment conducive to entering the Circle of compassionate listening.
- It is recommended that the national Compassion Circle have available the names of qualified mediators, psychotherapists and spiritual directors as resources for consultation and possible participation as needed. The national Compassion Circle coordinator will have a list of resources for each region readily available.
- It is recommended that all RCWP priests, deacons, bishops and candidates for ordination familiarize themselves with this national Compassion Circle policy and protocols.

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<sup>7</sup>Contact numbers are listed on page 14. Depending on the nature and number of participants engaged in a particular conflict the number of national Compassion Circle facilitators convened may be more than two.

**Budget**

We recommend that monies from the RCWP general fund be budgeted for national Compassion Circle meetings including travel, board and possible lodging for persons in conflict and circle facilitators.

National Compassion Circle facilitators will receive training annually and this may possibly require travel, board and lodging.

## Contact Numbers

To reach the designated contact coordinator for the national Compassion Circle, please call:

XXXXXXXXXX

Alternate

XXXXXXXXXX

Facilitators by region

Eastern Region

(Names) XXXXXXXX

XXXXXXX

Great Waters Region

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

Midwest Region

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

Western Region

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

## **Addendum and Resources**

That our thoughts may be true light,  
Finding their way into words  
Which have the weight of shadow,  
To hold the layers of truth.

When we look into the heart  
May our eyes have the kindness  
And reverence of candlelight.

*To Bless the Space Between Us*, p. 15  
John O'Donohue

May you have the wisdom to enter generously into your own unease  
To discover the new direction your longing wants you to take.

May Providence guide your thought and nurture your feeling.

May you know the urgency with which God longs for you.

*To Bless the Space Between Us*, p. 35-36 (adapted)  
John O'Donohue

## **Let Your God Love You**

Be Silent. Be still. Alone. Empty before your God.  
Say nothing. Ask nothing. Be silent. Be still.  
Let your God look upon you. That is all.  
God knows. God understands. God loves you with an enormous love,  
And only wants to look upon you with that love.  
Quiet. Still. Be.  
Let your God—Love you.

*In God's Womb, a Spiritual Memoir*, pp. 59-60 (adapted)  
Edwina Gateley

We will sit and listen in order to understand. We will sit and listen so attentively that we will be able to hear what's being said and also what's being left unsaid. We know that just by listening deeply, we already alleviate much pain and suffering in the other person.

*Peace Is Every Breath*, p. 104  
Thich Nhat Hanh

### **Prayer for Peace**

Peace-Bringer, create in us a heart filled with the kind of love that reflects your own. Send this love to those we care about and respect. Open our mind to those we want to reject. Open our heart to those we prefer to avoid. Open our eyes to see beyond the surface of individuals and recognize your presence in each one. May our thoughts, words, and deeds be devoid of violence in any form. Soften whatever is hardened in our heart so that we bring your peace wherever we go. May peace be our gift to one another.

*Prayer Seeds*, p. 53 (adapted)

Joyce Rupp

God's womb is trembling, yearning for Her child, grieved at the pain. What is being showered upon God's child is womb-love, divine love.

*She Who Is*, p.101, (Adapted)

Elizabeth A. Johnson

### **'You will not be overcome.'**

These Words: You will not be overcome, were said very insistently and strongly [by Jesus], For certainty and strength against every tribulation which may come. Jesus did not say: You will not be assailed, you will not be distressed, you will not be disquieted, but he said: You will not be overcome.

Short Text Ch 22 *Julian of Norwich: Showings*,  
Colledge & Walsh, eds.

### **Shalom: A Prayer from Many Spiritual Sources to Begin and End the Day**

Let me be at peace within myself.

Let me accept that I am profoundly loved and never need be afraid.

Let me be aware of the Source of Being that is common to us all and to all living creatures.

Let me be filled with the presence of the Great Compassion toward myself and toward all living beings.

Let me always be an instrument of my own liberation and not of my own oppression.

Let me see the face of Jesus in others.

Let me be the face of Jesus for others.

Let me be at peace within myself. Amen.

The Reverend Canon Elizabeth Kaeton



Holy One, you have given us the gift of story in our lives, ways of understanding who we are, ways of making sense of our world, of finding meaning and knowing how to respond to all that happens in our lives. Please show us where our stories fall short or are too narrow, where they exclude rather than include, where they divide rather than unite. Help us to see where a story we live out of may go amiss of what is real, where it allows us to escape becoming whole, where it lets us live comfortably in fear. Fill us with your story, the story of unity and compassion and love. Fill us with images that energize us and give us hope and lead us to the fundamental truth that you have tried to teach us all along: we are all one. Amen.

*Field of Compassion* (p. 23)  
Judy Cannato

Holy Heart of the Universe, help me to see myself in relation to all that is. Help me to recognize the ways that my energy touches all that is, the ways my habits and words affect all the wholes of which I am a part, and all the parts that make me whole. Empower me, that I may embrace the capacity for self-transcendence as I negotiate the tension between self-preservation and self-adaptation. Allow me to learn from experiences of self-dissolution, and enable me to grow in the capacity to live in freedom. May the morphogenic field that I am be life-giving to all. Amen.

*Field of Compassion* (pp. 39-40)  
Judy Cannato

Holy One, evidence of your self-communication in love is all around, everywhere. In the inner depths of my own heart, in the world, in all creatures around me, you live and move and have your being. I am not separate from you, and because of your wondrous love I am not separate from all creation. Help me to live with eyes wide open to your self-communication. Help me to be open to your lavish grace, to receive it without fear and with the conviction that you want nothing more than for me to receive it. In turn, may I be gracious to others, and instrument of your lavish grace to all I meet. Amen.

*Field of Compassion* (p 6)  
Judy Cannato

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