



This month's circle tale comes to us from Melissa Bailey-Kirk, a Methodist minister who dealt creatively with leading a church choir during a month-long period where there was no director.

Circle Tale, December 2005

Circle and the Choir

We had hired a music director who quit after seven days. When we asked him to share his story with us, he simply said, "I knew if I worked here, I would become sick."

Since music is at the heart of our congregational life, I decided to call a circle to see if we could work together to keep on singing until a new director could be brought in. (Believe me, I am not a director.) We gathered in the choir room. In the center I placed a candle, the crystal pitcher I use for baptisms, the stoneware I use for communion, a hymnal, and a Bible. A quilted angel that had been made for me by a choir member in one of my previous churches served as our talking piece.

Our Staff Parish Relations Team (SPRT) was present. I asked one of them to serve as guardian and sit across from me. Another member of our SPRT chair sat at the 3rd "corner" of the circle and still another SPRT member sat at the 4th "corner." When folks entered the room, they were visibly startled. For the most part, they graciously entered the circle by sitting in one of the chairs I had arranged. After everyone gathered, I began by explaining that I had called this conversation circle in order to provide a space where we could listen and speak respectfully for the purpose of unity and cooperation in our church.

I explained the reason for each item in the center and asked persons to make a contribution to the sacred center if they chose. Agreements were set. Candle lit. Scripture read. I shared two purposes for the circle: 1) to share information with the choir and affirm the importance of their ministry; 2) to consider how we might move forward together. I shared the information about the Music Director's resignation and some of his reasons, using general "we" language to bring us all together in processing the grief and working on a solution. Then I set up three rounds of the talking piece with the quilted angel as follows:

- Round One: Feeling(s) about information shared
- Silence and Prayer
- Round Two: What am I willing to contribute to help us move forward?
- Round Three: What do I need to receive in order to move forward?
- Check Out

All in all, it was productive. Words of forgiveness diminished the impact of words of hostility. The SPRT folks were honest and vulnerable as they shared their grief at not being trusted by the Choir. The Choir (for the most part) was vulnerable in sharing their desire to simply "sing."

That was over a month ago...and I have been leading the choir since then. Thank God we just hired a new Music Director!!! The Choir graciously received my leadership...or maybe they showed up each week to watch me make a fool of myself. Seriously, I think the fact that I was willing to do something for which I was ill-prepared demonstrated my commitment to their ministry and their passion.

If you have a tale to tell, contact the PeerSpirit office and we'll help you share it.

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