



As we enter the holiday season, churches step up their level of outreach and community visibility. We at PeerSpirit have been privileged to work with a number of church groups. Sometimes we have trained church leaders and clergy at our Circle Practica, other times we have offered workshops for different committees within a congregation. Our Circle Tale this month is written by Rev. Susan Mullins, Associate Pastor of St. Francis in the Foothills Methodist Church in Tucson, Arizona. Thank you Susan.

Circle Tale #14, NOVEMBER 2000

The Circle and My Church

I'm somewhat amazed and very excited at the positive response PeerSpirit circling is evoking at my church. Many people in my congregation have a deep desire to find ways to govern ourselves that embody the principles of circle practice. We have taken beginning steps in doing this, but have much to learn as we slowly internalize this new, but old way of being a community. Two examples of how this is working come to mind.

At the first meeting of our personnel committee at which we introduced circle practice, we created an environment that I had never before experienced in that context. In fact, we came up against a difficult issue regarding someone who had stopped coming to church because of one of my Sunday morning commentaries. Without the circle I would have either gone home crying or I would have reacted in the meeting by becoming defensive and disregarding the issues. As it was, however, I was able to speak from my heart about what this complaint brought up in me and the whole group was able to talk about the larger issues that we can deal with as a committee that aren't specific to one commentary. It's the larger issues that help us get to the heart of the tensions that we must keep in balance on our spiritual walks. I left that meeting feeling a sense of healing and no need to cry when I got home.

We have also introduced circle in our Council on Ministries program, an administrative body. After calling the circle, we do a check-in. Our check-in focuses on the main subject that we need to address in the meeting, so our check-ins can be lengthy. By doing this, we are able to stay focused and have enjoyed some rich sharing by creating this environment where all are truly invited to have their say. We spend lesser amounts of time on other things that need quick attention that month. We are developing a sense of direction that is evolving out of those monthly intentional meetings. Members comment that the meetings now feel worth their time and that they enjoy attending.

I don't think it's accidental that we are experiencing other benefits in our church such as excellent, skilled and committed people volunteering to provide leadership for existing and even new programs. Lately my job as a pastor has not been about trying to fill slots for committees, but rather helping enthusiastic volunteers figure out how to be effective in their positions. Circle is helping us be more in touch with the needs of our community, the gifts people have to offer, and finding ways to make these meet.

So, Happy Thanksgiving (in the US), and general thanksgiving for the circle.

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

*For more information on many applications of circle, visit our web site at www.peerspirit.com and subscribe to our monthly Circle Tale newsletter using the subscription mechanism at the top right of the page. Your e-mail address will **not** be shared or used by anyone other than PeerSpirit, and you can unsubscribe yourself at any time.*