

**Touchstones Project**

**Small Group Discussion Guide**

**Love**

**Hope**

**Preparation:** (Read *Touchstones* and the questions.)

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

**Opening Words:** “Now there is a final

reason I think that Jesus says, “Love your enemies.” It is this: that love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. Just keep being friendly to that person. Just keep loving them…. And by the power of your love they will break down under the load. That’s love, you see. It is redemptive, and this is why Jesus says love. There’s something about love that builds up and is creative. There is something about hate that tears down and is destructive. So love your enemies.” *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

**Chalice Lighting** (James Vila Blake), adapted

(In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story**: Take turns reading aloud parts of the following wisdom story.

***The Cure*** by Rev. Christopher Buice (558 words)

 Once upon a time there was a young girl named Maggie, who found out she had a very terrible disease and probably would never be well again.

 She was very, very sad, and although she had many friends, all of them were afraid to visit her because they feared they might catch the disease.

 So the little girl sat in her bed all by herself and was very lonely.

 One day she heard a knock on her door. “Come in,” she said and in walked three of her friends. One was a doctor, one was a minister, and one was a magician. Maggie was very glad to see them for no one else had been brave enough to visit her.

 “Hello, Maggie,” said her friends as they sat down around her bed. “We came to tell you something. Each one of us is going to try to find a cure for your disease.”

 “Yes,” said the doctor, “I’m going to go into my laboratory and do experiments until I discover a medicine that will cure your disease.”

 “And I,” said the minister, “am going to pray every day that you will be healed of this terrible disease.”

 “And I,” said the magician, “am going to look through my books of magic until I discover a potion or spell that will rid you of your disease.”

 Maggie smiled and was happy because she saw how much her friends cared for her.

 “Thanks,” she said.

 “We’re sorry that we can’t stay long to visit,” said her friends, “but we must rush off and begin our search for a cure. We’ll return in three days and surely by then one of us will have found a way to cure your disease.”

 And so, her friends went away in search of a cure, and once again Maggie was very lonely.

 For three days Maggie’s friends did everything they could to find a cure for the disease. The doctor worked hard in the laboratory but couldn’t discover any medicine that could help the little girl. The minister prayed every day and every night that Maggie would be healed of her disease, but the little girl was still sick. The magician looked through all the magic books, but there were no spells or potions that could cure Maggie’s disease. All three of Maggie’s friends were very sad for they felt that they had failed.

 After the three days were over, the doctor, the minister, and the magician returned to Maggie’s house and told her the bad news. “We’re sorry,” they said, “but we couldn’t find a cure. We did our best.” And the three friends began to cry.

 “Don’t cry,” said Maggie. “Before I was sick, I had many friends, but now they’re all afraid to visit me. This disease I have is a terrible one, but it’s nothing compared to the loneliness I’ve felt these last few days. I now know loneliness is the worse disease of all.

 “Right now, the medicine I need most is your friendship.

 “The prayer I need most is for you to simply be with me.

 “And the magic I need most is your love.”

 And so, the doctor, the minister, and the magician gathered around the little girl and laid their hands upon her. In the silence that followed, it is said that they found the cure.

 Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/story/cure>

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group

Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

**Readings from the Common Bowl**

“There is no progress in love, no perfection that one might someday attain. No love is adult, mature, and reasonable. In relation to love there are only children—there is only a spirit of childhood that is abandon, carefreeness, a spirit of letting go of spirit.” Christian Bobin

“When I am commanded to love, I am commanded to restore community, to resist injustice, and to meet the needs of my brothers and sisters.” Martin Luther King, Jr.

“They say a person needs just three things to be truly happy in this world: someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for.” Tom Bodett

“I don’t trust people who don’t love themselves and tell me, ‘I love you.’ ... There is an African saying which is: Be careful when a naked person offers you a shirt.” Maya Angelou

“You know, when it works, love is pretty amazing. It’s not overrated. There’s a reason for all those songs.” Sarah Dessen

“Love is friendship that has caught fire. It is quiet understanding, mutual confidence, sharing and forgiving. It is loyalty through good and bad times. It settles for less than perfection and makes allowances for human weaknesses.” Ann Landers

“Love is an untamed force. When we try to control it, it destroys us. When we try to imprison it, it enslaves us. When we try to understand it, it leaves us feeling lost and confused.” Paulo Coelho

“How many slams in an old screen door? Depends how loud you shut it. How many slices in a bread? Depends how thin you cut it. How much good inside a day? Depends how good you live ‘em. How much love inside a friend? Depends how much you give ‘em.” Shel Silverstein

“We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often.” Bob Moorehead

“Love is a force more formidable than any other. It is invisible, it cannot be seen or measured, yet it is powerful enough to transform you in a moment, and offer you more joy than any material possession could.” Barbara De Angelis

“When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace.” Jimi Hendrix

“What Is Love? I have met in the streets a very poor young man who was in love. His hat was old, his coat worn, the water passed through his shoes and the stars through his soul.” Victor Hugo

“Respect was invented to cover the empty place where love should be.” Leo Tolstoy

“So, the America I loved still exists, if not in the White House or the Supreme Court or the Senate or the House of Representatives or the media. The America I love still exists at the front desks of our public libraries.” Kurt Vonnegut

“Have enough courage to trust love one more time and always one more time.” Maya Angelou

“Love never dies a natural death. It dies because we don’t know how to replenish its source. It dies of blindness and errors and betrayals. It dies of illness and wounds; it dies of weariness, of witherings, of tarnishings.” Anaïs Nin

“All your life, you will be faced with a choice. You can choose love or hate …I choose love.” Johnny Cash

“Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness. It took me years to understand that this too, was a gift.” Mary Oliver

“Sometimes it’s a form of love just to talk to somebody that you have nothing in common with and still be fascinated by their presence.” David Byrne

“The beginning of love is the will to let those we love be perfectly themselves, the resolution not to twist them to fit our own image.” Thomas Merton

“The one thing we can never get enough of is love. And the one thing we never give enough of is love.” Henry Miller

“A purpose of human life, no matter who is controlling it, is to love whoever is around to be loved.” Kurt Vonnegut

“People have to love the Earth before they save it, so love is the key.” Bill Jacobs

“The best portion of a good …life: …little, nameless unremembered acts of kindness and love.” William Wordsworth

“You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.” Sharon Salzberg

“[Eros] is the love of healing, the love that reconciles the alienated and separated. It is the love of forgiveness that reaches to the depths of the finite experience of fragility, worthlessness, willful rebellion, or oppressed, silent passivity.” Diarmuid O’Murchu

“The best love is the kind that awakens the soul and makes us reach for more, that plants a fire in our hearts and brings peace to our minds.” Nicholas Sparks

“We need, in love, to practice only this: letting each other go. For holding on comes easily; we do not need to learn it.” Rainer Maria Rilke

“There is only one page left to write on. I will fill it with words of only one syllable. I love. I have loved. I will love.” Dodie Smith

“It is easy to love people in memory; the hard thing is to love them when they are there in front of you.” John Updike

“Friendship marks a life even more deeply than love. Love risks degenerating into obsession, friendship is never anything but sharing.” Elie Wiesel

**Sitting In Silence:** Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions).*

**Reading:** “The principal form that the work of love takes is attention. When we love

another we give him or her our attention; we attend to that person’s growth. When we love ourselves we attend to our own growth. When we attend to someone, we are caring for that person. The act of attending requires that we make the effort to set aside our existing preoccupations and actively shift our consciousness. Attention is an act of will.”

*M. Scott Peck*

**Living the Questions**

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. Is there a connection between love and happiness, and if so, how does it work?
2. Can love be unconditional, or are there always conditions that will limit it?
3. What gets in the way of self-love? What role does self-love play in our ability to love others?
4. How does society influence our understanding & expression of love, generally and for the LGBTQIA+ community?
5. How does our concept of love relate to ethics and morality in our decision-making?
6. How can love promote a willingness to build the common good?
7. Can love motivate people to seek justice? How?
8. What might a spiritual practice of love involve?
9. What are the benefits and challenges of UUs asserting that love is at the center of our faith?
10. What role does love play in your congregation?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person for the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

**Extinguishing Chalice (**Elizabeth Selle Jones) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

**Closing Words**

Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*