

## Fellowship Circle Resources - Topics: Boundaries

### Opening Reading

"Healthy boundaries are those that enable us to test or engage our experiences, and not retreat behind a wall of fantasy or wishes. Health boundaries enable us to take responsibility for what we are truly responsible for, our own happiness, not the happiness of others we are trying to rescue. Healthy boundaries are flexible, yes, but strong. In the wonderful phrase of psychologist John Stibbs, healthy boundaries enable us to "flourish in our uniqueness." Healthy boundaries allow us not to let other triumph or fall on their won terms. Healthy boundaries allow us not to beg our self-esteem from others. They keep us from turning hugs into blessings, or friendship into trophies. They help us to face manipulation or control in a relationship, and to confront it and not let us continue. Healthy boundaries enable us to join with others to find solutions to problems, so we don't carry the whole world on our back. They help us to build trust in ourselves and others and to generate good self-images without having to beg such things from others. Healthy boundaries are where we begin and where we leave off. Love is still love, compassion is still compassion, and communion with others is the source of so much joy and gladness in life. But I am here to say that the agency called the boundary can also be a great source of joy, great joy. And for communities of women and men and children, like this one, boundaries are our safety, our structure and our dignity. And I cannot pray for this community anything more wonderful than that." Mark Belletini, Senior Minister First Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbus, Ohio October 13, 2002

### Check-in

### Focus Reading:

Boundaries define what belongs to an individual on a physical, psychological or spiritual level. One of the most important survival tools a person can develop in a hierarchical system (like our society) is an understanding of boundaries.

### Questions:

Are boundaries difficult for you to set and to keep? Describe an experience you had in setting a boundary. How did it feel to actually create your own boundary with someone? How did it feel to respect someone else's boundary?

How are boundaries established in the workplace?

### Optional Reading (as time allows):

We usually think of boundaries as putting limits on relationships, but sometimes they allow the relationship to grow in ways we can hardly imagine. This reading is also from

the Mark Belletini's sermon. "Let me give you an example of a boundary between people. I remember when my best friend found out he had AIDS. He was, understandably, thunderstruck for weeks. Certainly both of us cried a lot. But then he decided he wanted to figure out how he wanted to face this illness emotionally. So he started to read the psychologists: Freud, Jung, Karen Horney, Adler, Rollo May etc. One after another, a vast undertaking, a whole library of information to digest. And, during this time, he called me up two and three times a day to talk about what he was reading. He would call me in the morning, afternoon, and at night. Finally, I found myself feeling both angry and sort of crazy about these calls. I was being objectified as some sort of guru, and had ceased to be a friend. My boundaries of time and attention were being crossed daily, as if I had infinite energy. I told him this several times, clearly, but the calls continued. So I decided to set a very certain boundary for him. "Stefan, I have told you I cannot relate to you in this way. I will take no calls from you for a month. After that, I will take no more than a call a week about these things." Stefan was shocked, but agreed to my terms. It was a tough month for me, and I know it was for Stefan too. I missed my best friend. But the thing is, I had missed him for a long time. Being his guru meant he wasn't my friend, because a guru, like a doctor, dentist, professor, teacher, psychologist, minister or other so called "people professionals," simply isn't friends with those that come to them, or may come to them, for counsel, or medical work, or information. It's inappropriate, and blurs very necessary professional boundaries. Actually, that month without Stefan was a good time for me to remember who I am as a person and friend, not a guru. For you see, I too had crossed a boundary...by letting my professional role completely overtake our equal friendship. I, too, had contributed to throwing things off balance. So I was establishing a boundary, not just for Stefan, but for myself. At the exact moment the month was over, Stefan called and said, "Can we talk as friends now...with me promising not to invade your life like General Hannibal and his elephants charging across the Alps?" "Of course we can," I said with teary eyes. "I've been waiting for this day all month. And I apologize to you for trying to rescue you from your own feelings by not facing my own." And our friendship deepened and delighted us both up to the very moment of his death, two years later. Boundaries are what enable us to maintain our identities as individual people in relationship or in communities.

Check-out, check on

Like and wishes

Closing Reading

Intimacy, play, and creativity require loss of control. Only when we have boundaries and know we can trust ourselves to enforce them and take care of ourselves, will we be able to let go enough to SOAR. These same activities help develop a sense of self, for it is through LOVE, PLAY, and CREATIVITY that we begin to understand who we are and become reassured we can trust ourselves. Having boundaries means having a self strong, NURTURED, HEALTHY and CONFIDENT enough to LET GO--and come back again INTACT." .....From the book: "Beyond Codependency" by Melody Beattie.

