



This circle tale comes to us from Sr. Marge Zulaski, a Wheaton Franciscan Sister, who was president of her community from 2004-2008. She was part of the Leadership Team who called PeerSpirit to train her community to use circle process in their governance.

Circle Tale, February 2009 The Value of Hearing Each Voice

How large can a circle be and still be effective for the growth of individuals and for the group as a whole? This was an unknown as we, Franciscan Sisters, began our adventure into circle process.

In 2005 three women and myself who were then the elected Leadership Team of the Wheaton Franciscan Community decided to initiate the circle process in our membership. We realized that for the first time in our history we were small enough, numbering 80 vowed members, to have in-depth conversation with all those able and willing to participate. The Leadership Team sent an invitation to all members to participate in a three-day circle training. Forty-five women agreed to participate and the remaining members pledged their support through prayer and blessing.

With the dependable guidance of Ann Linnea and Christina Baldwin, we entered into a learning circle process with a mixture of uncertainty and skepticism: *Can this work with a group this size? Don't we already know this? Can we come to decisions with this process?* It was a big experiment. Fortunately there was a spirit of generosity in our circle that I attribute to our grounding in Franciscan spirituality and the high value we place on community life and personal relationships.

The original plan was for three days of learning circle process, but at the end of that time our group was not satisfied that they had learned the process well enough. They asked for more experience with circle. In the following period of two and a half years, this Wisdom Circle of forty-five members met regularly about every two months for a total of thirty days with Ann and Christina serving as guides. We were seeking a level of transformation that only time, prayer, and attention could manifest.

One of many profound things we learned is that, **"Circle incarnates the value of hearing each voice and strengthens a common sense of wholeness."**

Hearing each voice on questions of importance had an impact upon the collective soul of the group as a whole. We used whole group and small group circles that brought to light some of our deepest values and that confronted our willingness to honor diversity among us. A cooking metaphor expresses what came of our mixing it up with each other and taking in the ingredients of each other – in the heat of this Circle process something was transformed. This experience gave us great hope that we will hold together in uncertain times. We can do what we need to do. And this grew in us before the economic crisis hit all of us in the world.

Now, in 2009, under a new Leadership Team that continues the circle governance, we are confident in applying circle process to our discussions and decision making as a Franciscan community. We are finding ways to adapt the circle process to provide opportunity for each one to contribute to decisions that shape our future.

The fullness of grace - the burst of blessing that lives in us now is the sense that we are together - we are whole.

*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. Your e-mail address will **not** be shared or used by anyone other than PeerSpirit, and you can unsubscribe yourself at any time.*