



Each month PeerSpirit offers an illustrative story of how someone is effectively using circle practices and principles to change or enhance a gathering. This month's tale is by PeerSpirit's Christina Baldwin.

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The Circle in Politics

Last April, I walked into a hotel room in northern California and a man who is running for President of the United States sat at a small table with his hand resting on the cover of my book, ***Calling the Circle***. He greeted me warmly and looked into my eyes, "Tell me, Christina," he said, "what is this really?"

"It's a group process methodology that switches the focus of groups from competition to collaboration..." Sensing receptivity, I ventured into deeper explanation, "People have been meeting in circles for thousands of years. Early societies were built upon the wisdom that emerged from the shared leadership of councils. Our future may depend on our ability to draw that collective wisdom into the modern age. The challenges that face us now need all of our contributions."

"I think I understand," he said. "Thank you." In the next 30 minutes, Dennis Kucinich, a US Congressman from Cleveland, Ohio, and I talked about the impact circle process might have on his campaign, and on the grassroots movement he is coalescing in America and beyond. Dennis is highly committed to the complex task of running for President AND using every public appearance as an opportunity to remind us all that WE are democracy, and that democracy depends upon citizen participation.

In the following weeks I utilized our years of work in circle process to develop "Dialogue for Democracy". This process is an invitation to enter an ongoing conversation that seeks to find the shared human values underlying our differences. Four basic principles serve this dialogue:

- We need to know each other.
- We can disagree on issues and still share common values.
- Diverse experiences, opinions, and ideas create stronger dialogues.
- Our lives and future depend on human goodness.

In July, I spent a week in the National Headquarters in Cleveland, using circle process to work with state and regional coordinators and national campaign staff. In the center of this circle, we laid out a swirl of campaign signs and set a two-foot high plaster statue of Uncle Sam proudly in the middle. Energy was high: the countdown of days before precinct caucuses and state primaries was alive in everyone's mind. We laid out basic structures in the large group and also met in small groups to strategize tasks. People went home with a sense that circle can work to gather ideas in the midst of fast paced work and unavoidable chaos. Leaders in Massachusetts, New York, and Washington state (to name a few) are using elements of this training. The Washington state Kucinich web page is organized around the Dialogues for Democracy. As these leaders unfold their state organizations, elements of circle surface throughout the campaign, in staff meetings, and on conference calls.

July 19th, speaking to 400 people on a Saturday morning in Seattle, Dennis called me to the front of the crowd and we spoke about igniting dialogue as part of the campaign. I handed out Dialogue for Democracy flyers until my hands were empty. In the American media at the moment only the very front runners among the Democratic candidates receive much attention. Yet, there is a groundswell of internet action and community participation for lesser known candidates.

I don't know what will happen in the coming months regarding circle process or PeerSpirit's collaboration with the campaign. And that's not the point of this tale: the point is that the work with the Kucinich campaign has increased our understanding of the possible environments where circle can be adapted to serve. The circle has begun its life in mainstream western politics.



Wherever you are reading this, whatever your politics, we invite you to enter this dialogue, to turn to a neighbor or friendly stranger and ask: What about democracy do you hold dear? What gives you optimism about the future of your country (be it the U.S. or another)? Do you believe that people who appear very different share common values? And what is one action you would be willing to undertake to insure a sustainable future?

No matter what happens: let's keep talking.

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.*