

**Covenant Group Homily
Mike Wilkes - 04/26/09**

**I was asked to speak about my experiences in covenant groups at WFlower
So I thought I would structure my homily like a covenant group meeting.**

So in a covenant group meeting there is:

**Chalice Lighting (we've done that)
Reading**

Very similar to the service but here's where it gets different

Check-In

What is it

How are you feeling? What's on your mind?

What do you need to leave behind to be present.

In the service - Lay leader gets to check in,

Minister/speaker gets to check in,

But you don't get to check in

"Sit and soak" which can be relaxing and joyful but you don't get to be heard

So here's my Check In:

I've been feeling disconnected from the church lately...

And in my software engineer, geeky, way it took me a while to understand why...

First, I had to get in touch with my feelings (took a few weeks)

And I finally realized that this is the first time since I've been at Wildflower

(And been here since Sunset Valley Elementary lunchroom days)

**that I haven't been facilitating or even participating in a covenant group or similar small
group at the church**

And I don't mean committees (I'm on committees)

So that's my check-in

And the next part of a covenant group meeting is the focus/purpose of the meeting

So the focus here is to talk about my experiences in covenant groups at Wildflower

Spiritual Pilgrims - helped start, facilitated it for 5 years, split - Barbara Dickens

Centered around discussion of spiritually oriented books

(did Tai Chi, walk labyrinths, went to satsangs, did retreat at the Crossings)

But the greatest lesson I learned was not from a book by (Echert Tolle or Ram Dass or Roger Walsh) but by the other members

One of my most vivid memories is of the older women in the group talking about how they couldn't understand why their adult sons didn't call them them more. Even for two minutes... How important it was? How much they looked forward to it.

And I had an epiphany? I was that son.

I finally understand how important those conversations were to my mother?

And luckily I got to change my behavior... Sometimes those realizations come too late.

And that is one of the strengths of covenant groups, covenant groups provide the opportunity to really listen to the stories of others.

Living with Spirit - spiritual practices brought by members of the group, our own wisdom

Massage our Wildflower president's feet

Chant with choir director

Yoga with the leader of our children's RE

And I got to know folks I'm not sure I would normally know and have as a friend...

At that time I was in the process of getting divorced, and I remember sharing with the group that I noticed for the first time that my wife (of 25 years) had removed her wedding ring

Now in a divorce there are many things to get sad and upset about, but that was the one thing, that symbolic moment, that really brought it home to me...

And I shared that with the group, and I got such a compassionate and empathic response, being held by that group, literally

Gay, straight, old, young, transsexual, short, tall, working, retired

There was a lot of trust and intimacy in that group

Covenant groups can provide the opportunity to build that trust, to be heard, to tell your story

Evensong (participated in)

Eight week series of gatherings similar to a covenant group experience

It's too bad that the entire church can't go through Evensong at the same time.

In one big circle, we'd all know each other a lot better

We're all here in a big group today, but what's the difference, we don't hear from you,

I want to know about you, and for me, that's not gonna happen at the coffee hour; that's pretty much introvert purgatory

Evensong is again a chance for you to be heard, and to hear others

And while it might only be 10 of your church-mates, ten of your church mates will know you a lot better and vice versa

Wildflower Caring Team

Not the caring committee (I'm on that too)

What it focused around was service outside the church

We provided practical support for a person challenged with serious illness

While not strictly a covenant group had a lot of the same components

And, service, is a part of most covenant groups.

And one of my favorite service projects from Spiritual Pilgrims (and I'm still doing it after 5 years) is to participate in First UU Freeze night.

On winter nights when the temperature is going to be below 32, First Church (and other area churches) sometimes transforms into a homeless shelter.

And I hope we bring that to the Wildflower building some day. Kelly Ramsey bringing food, Judy Morgan and Martin Bryant and I washing dishes.

Just another way to get to know your church mates.

And that brings us to the last part of the meeting...

**Likes and wishes (checkout)
So here's my Checkout**

And speaking of first church, for various reasons, I've been spending a lot of time at first church lately...

And I realized that Wildflower is the only church I've belonged to as an adult

**And First church is different from Wildflower, not better or worse but different
Bigger physically, more members, there are two services on Sunday, two REs
Lots of hustle and bustle, people coming and going, lots of groups and meetings
We have that here at Wildflower; now multiply it 3 or 4 times...
It easy to walk around and masquerade as a member because no-one knows everyone**

So how are we going to keep that sense of intimacy we have now as WildFlower grows?

**Well we can rely on the minister for that, and we have a wonderful minister but
as we've experienced here at Wildflower and First UU is experiencing now, ministers
come and go, sometimes not soon enough, sometimes too soon.**

**So my wish is that we keep a healthy covenant group program going here at Wildflower...
And I'd like to encourage you to join one of our small groups at the church.**

**And finally back to my check-in about not being in a group myself...
And if you've been listening I just encouraged you to join a group!
So what about me?**

I think I can tie this all up like a corny happy ending in a movie...

**So I'm feeling disconnected because I'm not in a covenant group,
I'm single, and I like to hang out with the Freeze Night team at First Church**

**Well, my Freeze Night team friends and I are forming a group for singles (across both
Wildflower and FirstUU and maybe LiveOak)**

**The intention of this group is to support singles with both social activities and a covenant
group experience.**

**If you're interested please see me or you can read about it in the weekly news or
newsletter.**

And I'm just gonna go live happily ever after...