



*Deep Listening. Fostering Trust. Bridging Communities.*

# Circles of Compassion: The Power of Forgiveness Community Dialogue

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"Forgiveness was needed in many areas and I'm still working on it. It feels good when I can let it go."

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*"It's about me learning how to forgive myself so I can spread that ability to my family and bring peace."*

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## Executive Summary

Circles of Compassion: The Power of Forgiveness dialogue took place on Thursday May 11, 2017 at the Frank Zeidler Center for Public Discussion located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Forgiveness Project partnered on this dialogue and the event began with personal stories from Forgiveness Project storytellers, Pardeep Kaleka and Arno Michaelis. After the introduction, each listening circle contained 6-8 individuals and was led by one of the 9 Zeidler facilitators.

In the listening circles, participants participated in three structured question rounds where they were asked to respond to three different prompts:

- Talk about a time when you either forgave somebody or were forgiven. What did that experience teach you about forgiveness?
- What is one particular conflict in our society that you think could benefit from forgiveness?
- Where do you feel pulled in different directions when trying to use forgiveness in your personal life?

After the three structured question rounds, participants were given the opportunity to share their thoughts in an unstructured part of the dialogue entitled Connection Conversation and Parting Words. During Connected Conversation participants were asked to share any questions that arose and/or thoughts about themes they heard or ideas for improving their relationships. In Parting Words, participants were given the opportunity to share a last comment that they wanted to communicate with the larger group.

During Round One, participants shared events that occurred in their past that required some type of forgiveness and what they learned from that experience. The majority of situations discussed centered around participants' family lives. Some members of the listening circles shared events involving physical and emotional abuse. Other individuals shared struggles with addiction, either regarding their own addiction or a loved one suffering from addiction. A few participants discussed professional events, involving work or school, that they had encountered. Lessons learned by the participants included remarks regarding the ongoing nature of forgiveness and the struggles that come with having to constantly work on forgiving/forgiveness. About half of the participants recounted an event during their childhoods and the other half reflected on an incident that occurred when they were adults. Participants also shared their struggles and unresolved feelings surrounding events that they had undergone. Other members in the listening circle communicated statements that were more conclusive and encompassed feelings of letting go and moving past difficult situations through forgiveness/forgiving. There were a variety of different ways participants were able to move on from their past experiences including finding forgiveness for themselves, being able to forgive others, being forgiven by others, and utilizing tools and resources such as workshops, therapy, and meditation.

In Round Two participants shared their concerns about race, religion, gun violence, and other societal problems they deemed as most deserving of forgiveness. The most frequently discussed topics were focused around issues related to race, religion, class, and gender. Many participants saw these problems as divisive and called for solutions that involved increased understanding, forgiveness, empathy, and love for others: “if we learn to forgive each other for what has happened we could move forward in a more peaceful direction.” Other participants discussed feelings that arose from the United States’ most recent election, with some individuals sharing their disagreements with family members or friends who voted for current President Donald Trump. Additional political topics discussed included concerns about gun violence, the U.S. educational system, homeless, and general political division. As in Round One, participants shared a mixture of resolved and unresolved feelings regarding the societal conflict they shared.

Participants shared their struggles with personal forgiveness in Round Three. For many, finding forgiveness for others who had hurt them was the most difficult aspect for them. They shared stories of complicated relationships with family members, coworkers, and members of society with whom they were trying to forgive. Some participants voiced challenges they faced when trying to find self-forgiveness, which for a few individuals was one of the hardest aspects of forgiveness: “However when it comes to myself I think it’s really hard to forgive me. I have forgiven people for some pretty horrible things they’ve done to me and others. I don’t understand why I have a hard time forgiving myself over smaller or lighter things.” Similar to the previous rounds, some participants expressed resolved feelings that enabled them to move past their difficulties, while others posed unanswered questions and/or roadblocks that were hindering them from letting certain issues go.

Participants had the opportunity for unstructured discussion during the Connected Conversation and Parting Words segments. Here individuals shared suggestions for others, words of support, and expressions of gratitude. A large portion of participants shared their appreciation for having had the opportunity to listen to others’ stories in the listening circles. Many members were happy they attended the listening circle, and discussed the new insights they learned about forgiveness through sharing their own stories and listening to others’ accounts. Consistent with what was shared during the structured rounds, there was a mixture of feelings expressed regarding forgiveness, which could speak to the complex nature individuals undergo when seeking personal forgiveness. Some members recommended workshops and other resources to others in the group that they felt would aid them in the future. Overall, this opportunity to share one’s experiences and struggles, allowed participants the ability to support others and/or discover what was needed to find closure in their own lives.

**Questions about this dialogue may be directed to:**

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## Analysis

### 1 **Question/Round 1: “Talk about a time when you either forgave somebody or were forgiven. What did that experience teach you about forgiveness?”**

“My son was able to give me the benefit of the doubt and that was very powerful to me.”

“We forgave each other on the spot without saying another word about the incident. This taught me that forgiveness is a release even though sometimes triggers can bring back the incident in our minds we know we’ve forgiven.”

During this round, participants reflected on situations that incited a need for forgiveness. Many individuals drew on their past familial experiences and shared past and ongoing situations they had encountered. Some individuals shared experiences from work or school that they had faced in the past. When communicating the lessons learned from these experiences, participants shared a mixture of positive and negative feelings. One group of participants found closure and were able to move on with the help of time, forgiveness, and healing resources such as a workshop or therapy, while another group shared feelings of lingering anger and ongoing difficulties.

#### 1.1 **Familial Events Needing Forgiving or Forgiveness**

Most of the events described in Round One were related to personal incidents involving family, with participants discussing struggles with spouses, siblings, and parents (both being a parent and/or encounters with their own parents). Some of these experiences involve(d) sexual and physical abuse (often from a parent or a spouse), addiction (either personal or involving a sibling or parent), and family division (including death and divorce). There was a fairly even split between the time when the events occurred with about half of the participants recounting feelings of past and/or ongoing anger, sadness, discontent surrounding events when they were a child (often involving their parents), and the other half discussing similar feelings surrounding events when they were an adult (often involving siblings, parents, or spouses).

##### **.1.1.1 Forgiveness for Abuse**

Abusive relationships involving one’s father was a recurring topic discussed by individuals during Round One. Some individuals shared how they have moved past their feelings of anger while others expressed sentiments of continual unrest. One participant discussed encountering her/his father’s abuse that was fueled by anger and racism:

“My father was an abusive man, very racist in his attitude. As I left the family circle and realized the world I was given wasn’t the real world, I felt lied to by my father. It was hard being around him because he was so angry.”

Another participant recalled grappling with the discovery of his/her father's abuse toward his/her mother and the resulting continual struggle to forgive him:

"Mom passed last April. While caring for her at the end, I learned how extensive dad's abuse was. I became upset and remain upset to this day."

#### **.1.1.2 Forgiveness for Addiction**

Addiction was another frequently discussed situation burdening individuals. Some participants shared their own personal struggles with addiction and the forgiveness they found from the family members they had hurt. A few participants discussed family members who suffered from addiction and the resulting difficulty that stemmed from their loved one's struggle:

"I did a lot of awful things to my parents as an addict... Forgiveness was needed in many areas and I'm still working on it. It feels good when I can let it go."

"My husband has had a past struggle with addiction. It's easy for things to trigger me towards blame or use it as an excuse. I'm still in the process even when I think it's been released."

### **1.2 Professional Events Needing Forgiving or Forgiveness**

Four participants described professional experiences at work or school as events requiring forgiveness. A few participants cited issues of management as being difficult for them, with one individual stating that s/he did not receive proper guidance when a client s/he worked with committed suicide:

"I was new to counseling and really needed input from my supervisor on how to deal with this tragedy. My supervisor though didn't talk to me about it for a considerable time."

Another participant discussed her/his struggles with racism in school as a child. S/he expressed her/his difficulty learning English and the ridicule s/he experienced from their fellow classmates as a result:

"Growing up here, my first language was Spanish and I didn't speak much English. I came from a small village and found myself in a big city. I was in a program for Spanish speakers but then that program was cancelled. and everything was in English. It was like a bomb had dropped. Classmates made racist remarks."

As difficult as this experience was, this individual did recognize that this experience brought her/him closer to her/his family:

"I got closer to my family and began understanding racism."



## 1.3 Forgiveness and Healing

### 1.3.1 Unresolved Experiences

Many participants' concluding remarks conveyed a lack of resolution stemming from the event that they had recounted. These comments frequently included descriptions of forgiveness as an ongoing process:

"I realized I need to forgive these people who treated me so badly. I asked God how often I have to forgive them and the answer is **"again and again."**

"It can consume me. Forgiveness was needed in many areas and **I'm still working on it.** It feels good when I can let it go."

"I keep taking off layers but **there are always more.**"

**"Forgiveness is a process"**

**"I'm still in the process** even when I think it's been released."

"It takes a long time to forgive. From a musician's perspective, **forgiveness is more like practicing than giving a performance.**"

"Forgiveness is like a river to me- being in forgiveness is like standing in a river, sometimes well anchored, sometimes flowing. **Forgiveness is a process.**"

One individual imparted his/her difficulty at finding a resolution due to his/her father's inability to move past their conflict:

"I left my family's house at 18 because of him and know I need to forgive him. It's ongoing. I feel like I'm done but he doesn't want to be done."

For some members, their inability to move on was due to lingering feelings of anger and hate that they were unable to release. One participant expressed struggling with continued interaction with his/her sister's husband who was involved in an incident with his/her son:

"It's a little harder for me with her husband. We talked a little bit, but I can still feel that negative energy inside of me so I know I have not completely forgiven him. I'm working on it. It is so much more about the anger that I hold onto."

Another individual communicated her/his lingering negative feelings toward forgiving others:

"Sometimes I still get angry and feel like it defined a lot of who I am as a person, so it seems that I'm not done with the process of forgiving, but sometimes I feel like there's no one to forgive."

### **.1.3.2 Resolved Experiences**

Other participants expressed feelings of peace, hope, and gratitude after moving on from their past experiences and finding forgiveness. Some individuals discussed their ability to move on after difficult divorces:

"Now my ex and I can get together and have lunch without having my gut wrench. I am grateful. I have learned gratitude."

Another individual felt empowered by their ability to move on from her contentious divorce stating:

"I learned it was in my control to let it go - it's still up there today."

Empathy was another common emotion expressed when individuals recounted moving on from their past experiences. For example, one member found forgiveness for his/her parents when s/he was able to think outside of his/her own struggle:

"I see that my parents did the best they could with their own pain."

Other participants similarly stated:

"Forgiveness over time was something that was really necessary for me to move forward in my life. I just realized that people make mistakes – that's life – and we learn from mistakes."

"I realized that I loved my father and really wanted to renew the relationship. The only way to do that was to recognize how bad he was hurting."

For some individuals, impending death was an event that enabled them to find a resolution and forgiveness. A few members described the empowerment and understanding that occurred during the deaths of their fathers:

"Before he passed, I felt like he had given me back my power."

"When he was near the end of his life, he became softer and was surprised that I wanted to be present. He said, 'I thought if we didn't all agree, then there wouldn't be love.'"

One participant however, needed to explicitly recognize their own forgiveness for the person who wronged them before they were able to move forward:

"At first it seemed was easy for me to let go it because the person passed away. For me it was I didn't need to forgive because it stopped happening, so it was easy to let go. I never thought about did I need to forgive or not to forgive until I became an adult and started to process it a lot different."

## 1.4 Healing Methods

Some participants mentioned a person, activity, or mindset that they were able to (or were trying to) utilize in order to foster forgiveness. These methods included finding forgiveness for others, discovering self-forgiveness, and/or harnessing tools such as workshops, therapy, and meditation.

### .1.4.1 Forging Others

One of the most prevalent ways participants cited as a method for healing was being able to find forgiveness for the individual responsible for their pain. They expressed feelings of empathy, openness, and self-realization as methods for inciting their healing processes:

"I realized I need to forgive these people who treated me so badly."

"I wrote each of my three children a letter asking for forgiveness."

"I realized that if I didn't forgive him that my feelings of anger and aggression wouldn't go away."

### .1.4.2 Self-Forgiveness

Another method for healing expressed by some participants was being able to discover self-forgiveness. These individuals communicated insights and things they have learned through completed and/or ongoing self-forgiveness:

"Forgiveness is about healing myself"

"I have to forgive myself for hating racists."

"I've forgiven her for that, but it's harder to forgive myself."

"It does seem like forgiving other people is easier than forgiving myself which is something I still struggle with and am working towards. It's one of the reasons I'm here...For me, forgiveness has a lot to do with anger. I think it's more about me than it is about anything or anyone else."

### .1.4.3 Forgiveness from Others

A few individuals expressed the surprise and gratitude they felt when they were forgiven by others. Their narratives included the healing and learning they experienced when their loved ones were able to move past their mistakes. One individual shared a story when her son forgave her for running over his foot with her car:

"I was amazed how he was so eager to forgive me. He would say to people, 'It wasn't her fault.' My son found reason to see the best in me at such an early age. It was powerful to see how amazing he was. His action changed me. My son was able to give me the benefit of the doubt and that was very powerful to me."

Another individual shared a circumstance when she was forgiven by her husband for making a significant financial mistake:

"I told my husband what had happened and how upset I was. Within 15 minutes he said 'I forgive you.' It just lifted me and released a lot of the tension."

#### **.1.4.4 Using Tools and Resources for Healing**

Additional resources for healing included prayer, attending a workshop, physical activities such as meditation, and receiving advice or therapy from others. One individual was able to move on from their divorce through the attendance of a workshop. Specifically, s/he stated a zip lining activity that was pivotal in her/his healing process:

"Some time later I went to a workshop/class in the Southwest at the Pecos River. One of the activities involved riding a zip line down from a mountaintop. Before I jumped, my counselor advised me to leave my troubles on the mountaintop. The process was freeing."

Prayer and religion were also cited as useful sources for discovering healing for other individuals. Personal prayer, prayer services, and lessons learned through religion were discussed by these participants:

"My family is Christian, so we believe in forgiveness and we all worked on forgiving him."

"I don't usually tell other people when they hurt me but I can always tell God and that's good because I'm forgiven and then challenged not to be that way anymore."

"Religion requires that we not carry grudges."

## **2 Question/Round 2: "What is one particular conflict in our society that you think could benefit from forgiveness?"**

"Having a record makes it hard for people who are trying to do better."

"For me, the biggest issue that has an impact on my life is race relations."

"I think about the cycle of trauma. Inability to forgive passes along trauma. I wish our culture had rites of passage that included a realistic understanding of forgiveness."

The societal conflicts discussed covered a variety of different topics including division around race, religion, gender, and class; the recent presidential election; gun violence; and the criminal justice system. Solutions to these societal conflicts included the need for love, empathy, compassion, and understanding of others' differences.

### **2.1 Problems with Prejudice**

Many individuals expressed the need to end polarizing thoughts around religious, gender, and racial differences. They discussed the need to forgive and accept others despite their differing opinions, viewpoints, or past wrongdoings. Race was often discussed by members with some

calling for others to be more empathetic and compassionate to those who were racially different from themselves:

"Disagreements with religion, sexuality, race. When someone says something that I don't agree with, it triggers pain in me. It creates barriers, I just keep trying to convey to others to recognize humanity by listening and accepting them where they are."

"For me, the biggest issue that has an impact on my life is race relations. ...I think it is such a raw issue and has been for so long, that if we learn to forgive each other for what has happened we could move forward in a more peaceful direction."

"Racism is one area where we need to see people for who they are, not judging people by the way they look. Once we realize the pain caused by racism we can move to forgiveness."

One individual discussed communication problems stemming from others' lack of understanding regarding gender identity.

"I feel like it would be helpful if there were more forgiveness around communication mistakes that people often make – especially around identity. That whole area is expanding so widely – LGBTQIA and what is gender, sexuality, and preference. And there seems to be rapidly shifting ground as far as what is okay to say and how to address a person. Especially intergenerationally, there are a lot of missteps that people can make."

Some members voiced concerns over religious differences:

"I feel anti-religion hatred here although I've attended many churches. Maybe it's because there's less diversity here."

"People using religion to leave little room for forgiveness. They know God will forgive, but self-righteousness offers intolerance for others. We could set up situations that will allow for middle-ground opinions."

"There are so many things, such as 911 and the hate crimes against Muslims that need forgiveness to play a role. A lot of people haven't forgiven the perpetrators and continue to hate all Muslims."

A few individuals felt that society could benefit by bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. One participant expressed concern for environmental destruction that they attributed to the gap between the rich and the poor:

"One conflict I'd like to address is between those who have power and those who don't. This leads to gaps between the rich and poor, abusing the land."

## **2.2 Problems with Politics**

Political issues surrounding violence, the educational system, homelessness, and the current election were also brought up by participants.

### **.2.2.1 The Election**

Contention and division surrounding the election of President Trump was discussed by five individuals, four of whom were left with more questions and unrest than answers and solutions:

"I want to understand those people who voted for Trump. We want an explanation rather than knowing the experience behind an action."

"If we look at the Trump situation, what is to be forgiven? Who's supposed to be forgiving—us or him?"

"Specifically with Trump, with how many people embrace the partisanship, the hate, the cruelty toward underdogs. I'm still in shock he got into office."

"I have a co-worker. She's gay but voted for Trump. Her reason was, 'I want to retire early.' I still cannot get over this."

### **.2.2.2 Gun Violence**

Gun violence was of particular concern for some participants. They expressed a need for more understanding surrounding issues of gun control and gun violence, citing a need for forgiveness as a solution. Two participants called for more understanding for mass shooters:

"I think our issues of gun violence is bad and I can forgive the shooter but people need to be angry to have voice to speak out and take action."

"I think that an area of society that can definitely benefit from forgiveness involves mass shooters. I feel like in our society we see these people who do these actions as evil people who are just horrible. We dehumanize them. In reality, as much as they did do wrong, they are human, too."

### **.2.2.3 The Criminal Justice System**

A few participants felt that an improved criminal justice system would be beneficial to society. They stated that forgiving those with criminal records and providing solutions for their reintegration into society would aid in resolving this conflict. All participants discussing this topic cited the reintegration problems faced by individuals recently released from prison, and expressed sentiments similar to this participant:

"One group that would benefit from forgiveness is those who have been released from prison. It is hard for them to get a second chance, to get a job, to get a place to live, even if they have changed their lives."

#### **.2.2.4 Additional Political Issues**

Additional topics discussed included education, parental custody, homelessness, entitlement programs, immigration, and general political issues. Several participants also inserted a personal anecdote when describing a societal conflict. This spanned from personal issues with family to situations at their job and seemed to inform their approach to proposed solutions. In addition to forgiveness, suggested solutions included acceptance, communication, understanding, and love. These comments were similar to these participants' views:

"With every action there is something that happened that got them there."

"We need more education and more acceptance. We need less stereotyping when we don't even know them."

"We need love and compassion for all and to learn from differences."

Some participants expressed feelings that did not have a resolution and voiced comments such as:

"I don't think I can forgive them for the cruelty."

"I have a group of ladies, we wrote postcards to legislators. And I thought, 'What the heck will this do?' and I lost hope."

"I'm not certain it makes sense for the oppressed to forgive. And me, as a white privileged person, do I deserve forgiveness when I'm relatively apathetic towards the effects of white privilege?"

### **3 Question/Round 3: Where do you feel pulled in different directions when trying to use forgiveness in your personal life?**

"These are my torn feelings. I would give her a kidney, but I don't want to have conversations with her."

"As a child of Holocaust survivors, I struggle with the question of whether I have the right to forgive the offspring of perpetrators or if it's my responsibility to continue a legacy."

"I got mugged and when the gun was pulled on me, my first thought was, 'How am I going to forgive you for this?'"

Participants expressed either needing to forgive themselves or forgive the person who wronged them when discussing a circumstance in which they felt pulled in different directions. Similar to Rounds One and Two, some participants expressed resolved feelings that enabled them to move past their difficulties, while others posed unanswered questions and/or roadblocks that were hindering them from letting certain issues go.

### 3.1 Issues Forgiving Others

Forgiving others was the most prevalent type of forgiveness raised by participants in Round Three. Contention with family, coworkers, and members of society were discussed by those seeking to reconcile their feelings of forgiveness for others. Forgiveness in this area was expressed by some as an ongoing process that they are working toward and/or struggling to maintain. One individual expressed the difficulty of finding forgiveness for his/her sister who constantly antagonizes him/her:

"There is one person on this planet who can flip me into my lizard brain so fast – my sister. I struggle with her. She is my test case for my ability to forgive. The things that she says are just spiteful and hateful and come out of nowhere like 'zing!'"

Race and gender were discussed by a group of individuals during this round. Some shared stories around their personal experiences with racial discrimination, while others communicated the racial injustices they had seen in society:

"To see the lack of acknowledgement in my personal life is really hard when I see that the racism and segregation continues. How do you deal with the daily offenses?"

"One struggle I have is trusting that God will handle the injustices - not just at the end of times but present day. It doesn't feel fast enough for me when I think about racial wrongs. I have to leave it."

"To see the lack of acknowledgement in my personal life is really hard when I see that the racism and segregation continues. How do you deal with the daily offenses?"

### 3.2 Issues with Self-forgiveness

Self-forgiveness was another area addressed when participants recalled situations where they felt pulled in different directions. Some commenters included thoughts of hope and/or perseverance when describing their self-forgiveness journey, while others cited the difficulty connected to this type of forgiveness. One individual shared the problems s/he encounters when attempting self-forgiveness:

"However when it comes to myself I think it's really hard to forgive me. I have forgiven people for some pretty horrible things they've done to me and others. I don't understand why I have a hard time forgiving myself over smaller or lighter things. I guess when I forgive others I can remove myself from the equation; but when it's yourself you can't really do this."

Another participant discussed finding self-forgiveness when s/he was able to understand her mother-in-law's dementia as a mental illness:

"Mother-in-law relationships are hard and I beat myself up for not having compassion for her... I forgot about the dementia being an illness and didn't understand her harshness in that way. Now I do; after years of beating myself up my friends told me to forgive myself."



### 3.3 Proposed Solutions

#### .3.3.1 *Cutting Ties*

Solutions for the circumstances described by individuals in this round included the need for compassion, understanding, love, grace, and letting go. Letting go came in the form of cutting ties for a few individuals. For some this was something they had already accomplished, while for others it was something they envisioned for the future:

"I can forgive people but sometimes I have to let the relationship go. I have to leave. It is like giving up a bad habit. Maybe I can use forgiveness so that I am free to go."

"I want to move away to another state and start over. I want to be treated as an equal. Maybe I will move away to someplace warm."

#### .3.3.2 *Having Empathy*

A few individuals found healing by thinking outside their own perspectives and being more empathetic toward others. One individual described that being able to understand her/his father's intentions help her/him with forgiveness:

"It's hard for me to let go. I feel like my father is just socially awkward and in many ways he doesn't mean it. I just don't think he knows how to communicate nicely because as a child he was never communicated nicely to. Remembering that is what helps me forgive."

Similarly, another individual stated that thinking outside of their own point of view helped them move forward:

"I feel pulled in different directions when I'm feeling angry, but also realize that I need to put aside my pride. I try to see it from God's perspective. He forgave everyone all their sins."

### 3.4 Ongoing Struggles

As in past rounds, a combination of resolved and unresolved feelings were shared by participants. Some expressed ongoing questions and/or unresolved feelings of anger and blame:

"I struggle with the question of whether I have the right to forgive the offspring of perpetrators or if it's my responsibility to continue a legacy."

"I need to realize that blame is avoiding taking action on forgiving."

Others described how hard it is for them to avoid conflict when they are faced with continual provocations:

"At times I point my ire at him, I can get really angry with him which is hard due to him having an illness."

"It doesn't feel fast enough for me when I think about racial wrongs."

## 4 Connected Conversation

"The time it takes to forgive is different for different people."

"You have to feel your way through forgiveness, not think through it. Slow down and know that you're not the only one in the universe."

"With your story about your friend I believe it's wonderful that it just washed off. I think we're human beings."

During the time remaining, participants shared their general thoughts, struggles, hopes, and suggestions with the listening circle. During this segment, participants exhibited more interaction with each other, and overall, more encouraging sentiments than in the previous rounds. However, similar to the previous rounds, individuals shared their questions and ongoing struggles they were dealing with surrounding with forgiveness.

### 4.1 Messages of Support and/or Suggestions or Aspirations for the Future

The majority of participants provided suggestions and/or insights regarding forgiveness during this segment of the dialogue. Some members recommended letting go of people in one's life or releasing a negative feeling such as anger. During this round members offered opinions that used pronouns such as "we" and "everyone," evoking a shared approach to forgiveness. These comments were similar to the following statements:

"If we don't get rid of hate, it's really hard to forgive. Hate is something that's really hard to let go of – especially in larger picture, societal issues – because it does have a lot of energy, but it also very destructive."

"Everyone experiences struggles."

Certain participants were able to provide insights on forgiveness based on their own personal experiences. One member used this experience to encourage another individual in the group:

"There is hope. I am aware of my white privilege, what I have taken for granted and say, 'Hang in there, girl!' Your presence is a gift."

A group of individuals recommended healing resources such as books, workshops, and processes or actions:

"...meditations really help."

"Generational issues can be healed through constellation therapy."

"The JCC is presenting art with a discussion about 'the other' that is very interesting."

## 4.2 Questions, Hopes, and/or Resolutions based on Personal Experiences/Trauma

Some participants expressed ongoing struggles tied to familial and/or societal issues. For these individuals, attempting to find forgiveness raised unanswered questions and/or brought about continual burdens and ongoing uncertainties. Statements surrounding this topic included:

"I've never felt so vulnerable. I'm an introvert and the others are all extroverts and conflict-averse."

"Is forgiveness of a community different than forgiveness of a person?"

"It's very hard and I've gone through a lot with my family; it's like an open wound."

## 5 Parting Words

"It felt good to tell my story for the first question. I had been holding it back for a while now. Thank you, everybody."

"I feel a sense of admiration for everyone in this group. No one had to be here, but here we are. We can go home with what we've learned and affect others. I feel really encouraged to have a conversation like the one we had tonight."

Concluding remarks of the Circles of Compassion Dialogue were largely positive. Some members shared expressions of gratitude, rejuvenation, and relief were circulated during this time. Other individuals imparted lessons they had learned during the Circles of Compassion dialogue, and communicated their plans for finding forgiveness in the future.

### 5.1 Feelings of Gratitude and Appreciation

A group of participants felt particularly grateful for having attended the group:

"I'm really glad that I came. I didn't know what it was about and it helps me think about how I am as a person and how I've lived my life. I've learned that giving value to people – respecting them first and foremost – makes forgiveness possible."

"I'm glad I came here tonight. I need to forgive myself more than anything. I keep trying to play catch-up. I need to start dealing with it. If I can't forgive myself I can't forgive others."

"I'm really glad I came tonight. For me it was more a selfish issue – more of my needing to forgive myself than other people. It's about me learning how to forgive myself so I can spread that ability to my family and bring peace."

Many participants communicated gratitude and appreciation in relation to hearing others' stories in the group:

"It felt good to tell my story for the first question. I had been holding it back for a while now. Thank you, everybody."

"I always enjoy the stories. The two guys who spoke were very interesting."

"I feel a sense of admiration for everyone in this group. No one had to be here, but here we are. We can go home with what we've learned and affect others. I feel really encouraged to have a conversation like the one we had tonight."

"I'm really impressed by all of the voices I heard tonight. I think all the voices that we've heard tonight show that we highly value forgiveness and also understand that we all struggle with it. I'm particularly struck by what another participant shared about breaking a cycle. My mother also worked hard to break a cycle in my family – to work through the trauma she had as child."

## **5.2 Lessons Learned**

Some members communicated lessons learned through the dialogue. Similar to the sentiments discussed in Connected Conversations, these comments included participants' new understandings and aspirations for forgiving in the future:

"I've learned that giving value to people – respecting them first and foremost – makes forgiveness possible."

"Your 4-step model for self-forgiveness. I know intellectually I'm responsible for my own happiness. It's a practice. I start a process to rewire my brain."

"I will remember that forgiveness is a journey, not a ritual moment. It takes time. I will remember how people can change, especially Arno's example of being a leader in a hate movement to being a leader in forgiveness, due in part, to the power of people around him."

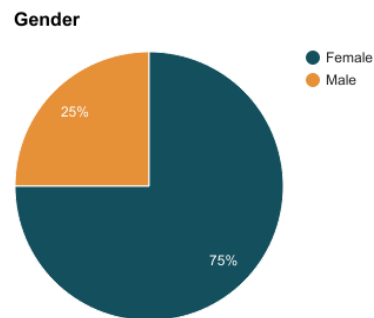
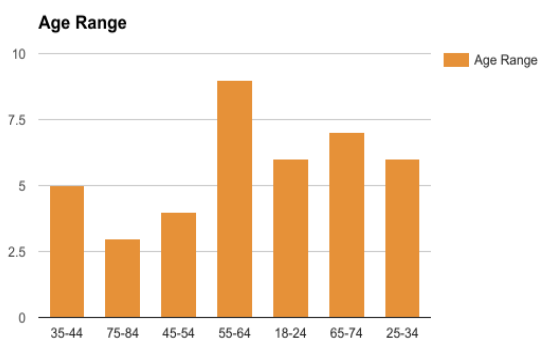
## Feedback Forms

### Participant demographic information

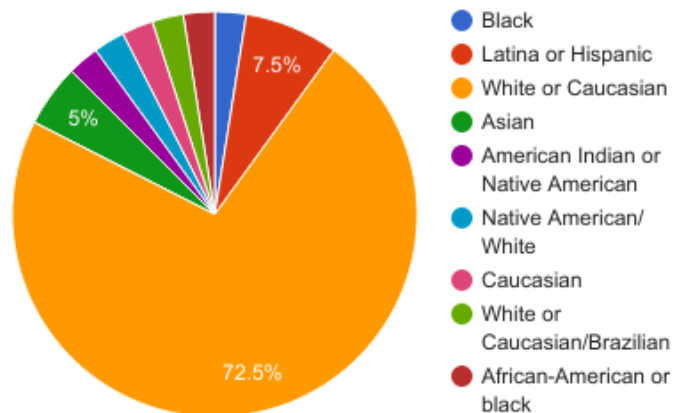
#### Zip Code

Participants came from 25 different zip codes, including:

53072, 53122, 53123, 53129, 53132, 53140, 53188, 53189, 53202, 53207, 53208, 53209, 53210, 53211, 53212, 53213, 53215, 53216, 53217, 53219, 53220, 52221, 53222, 53223, 53225, 53226, 53228.



#### Race & Ethnicity



## Feedback Form Questions

### What was the most beneficial part of the discussion for you?

- All good. the diversity
- All of it, opportunity to do "deep listening" without Judging. Also, hearing Arno and Pardeep. Inspiring people exchange
- Being able to openly express thoughts
- Being able to share our personal stories & really embrace everyone's journey in forgiveness. It was very helpful to listen to everyone's strongly & be able to connect to it in some way
- Being heard and listening deeply and finding connection despite being without dialogue
- Clarifying my own thoughts
- Finding common ground
- Great facilitation and discussion
- Having time to speak
- Hearing everyone's stories
- Hearing from the others
- Hearing other points of views
- Hearing other's insights
- Hearing others stories
- Hearing participants stories. Understanding properly and deeply that you can forgive and cut someone out of your life.
- Hearing personal stories about forgiveness
- Hearing the speakers share their stories of forgiveness before the discussion was beneficial.
- How open 3 out of the 4 men in the group were! that forgiveness is a Journey
- I enjoyed hearing the personal stories in our group as well as the speakers at the beginning...very inspiring
- It was good.... giving time for people to talk without interruptions
- Just taking the time to reflect on the questions.
- Learning every one's story and discussing their understanding of forgiveness.
- Listening to others stories and hearing differences & similarities & embracing both Arno & Pardeep were inspirational. I am glad I came here tonight and met them in person
- Listening to others w/o judgment
- Listening to others, share their experiences

- Listening/hearing deeply others journey of forgiveness
- Looking at different perspectives. Being more open mind. Talking about my experiences. Relating other experiences w/mine.
- Not much - other being the black woman in my group
- Openness time
- Realizing I am not where in the forgiveness process. It sometimes feels like .....
- Really .....thinkers and openness
- Releasing build up feelings
- Self-reflection
- That it got me to consider forgiving people that hurt me such as my grade school teachers and roommate of 6 yrs. who I live w/without
- The Circle
- The speakers & those in circle
- The stories are always the best - especially the 2 guys that spoke in the beginning
- Understanding that forgiveness is a process - understanding that we forgive for our own peace of mind and to honor our humanities - the power of the circle

### **What questions or concerns are you leaving with?**

- Do I really know true forgiveness
- hoping for more diversity in future groups
- How can a person promote hearing in personal relationships as a part to hearing society as a whole
- How can I maintain the forgiveness process to other. I forgive to a point and stop working on it. But need to keep ....deeper into my forgiveness ....
- How can we as humans teach forgiveness?
- How do I create more space to process my own forgiveness journey?
- How do I forgive?
- How do I open myself up more to forgiveness
- How does forgiveness work/look like on a day to day basis when you can't get away from the person you need to forgive (allowing yourself distance)?
- How to expand forgiveness into the world?
- How to instill this sense of forgiveness in the general society, schools, etc.
- How to stay in the process of self-forgiveness
- How to take the discussion home.
- I am still thinking about why I found the 2nd question so difficult to answer

- I wondering how to forgive. I want to know what some effective action steps would be.
- Just lots of thoughts, not sure!
- May be I shaved to match.... I am usually pretty quiet
- None
- None
- None
- None! thank you!
- Not a question but an encouragement. I am encouraging, hopeful. more hopeful than when I come.
- Really more I just am challenged for the ongoing journey to forgive
- Simple definition of the word forgiveness
- That anger is an energy force some may grow too comfortable .....
- This is very disporting to still be the only one to get asked the "Black" question! Truly this experience was very difficult from the facilitator interrupting me - Also Ellen didn't write most of nothing in her notes about my stay but spent pages on ...
- We need more forgiveness discussions/groups and restorations justice groups in Milwaukee. All over.
- What am I going to do to better myself? thinking about how I can share my experience here w/others.
- What are the components of forgiveness
- What do the others think and how would they respond to some of my answers?
- What more stories! to hear more experiences!



## Annex

- 1 **Question 1:** "Talk about a time when you either forgave somebody or were forgiven. What did that experience teach you about forgiveness?"

### 1.1 Familial Events Needing Forgiving or Forgiveness

#### .1.1.1 *Forgiveness for Abuse*

- "I had a situation in my life when I was 11 years old with sexual assault. There was man molesting my mom—my father had gone to work and this person was harassing my mom. When she refused he tried to sexually molest me and he was a church leader. When I went to tell people no one believed me. I told my mom and for her to tell others what he had done but she said no one believed you they won't believe me. I told my mom and asked her to come forward with me because if he was doing it to us he was probably doing it to others; but she was afraid."
- "I had a rough relationship with my father during my teens and it got physical. That's my dad."
- "My father was in Vietnam. He came back and married my mom. He had me and my sister two years later. He was always very angry and abusive to me and my sister."
- "I have only shared this with a handful of people in my life. Growing up, I was taught the religious belief to always forgive people and always ask for forgiveness. It was very much a part of everyday life. When I was about 9 or 10, I was molested and I never told anybody until I was in about my 20s."
- "I thought I had forgiven my father for his abuses, verbal and physical. I chose someone outside the faith to marry, and I wasn't forgiven for that."
- "Mom passed last April. While caring for her at the end, I learned how extensive dad's abuse was. I became upset and remain upset to this day."
- "My father was an abusive man, very racist in his attitude."
- "When I was 20 I reached a point where I tried to forgive everyone in my life. When on them was my dad. He used brute punishment of toddlers. There was an incident when I was 17, I won't say what happened but he never hit me again."

#### .1.1.2 *Forgiveness for Addiction*

- "I did a lot of awful things to my parents as an addict."
- "I relapsed, my wife cheated on me, I was filled with hate."
- "I visited my daughter in Kansas City. My husband and I were aware of how strongly she smelled of alcohol use—and she gets pretty explosive...I am an alcoholic, I talk with alcoholics. I am worried for my daughter."
- "I'm in recovery. My mom and sister have forgiven me for not being there for them."
- "A person I forgave was my father. He was kind, well-respected. He struggled with mental illness and died at 49. He drank to deal with his pain. No one talked about alcoholism, addiction."
- "My husband has had a past struggle with addiction."

- "My dad was a very sick man, including his alcoholism."

## 1.2 Professional Events Needing Forgiving or Forgiveness

- "When I was hired into my job I was told I would be one of two directors. When I started, my employees revolted so the job was changed and I was demoted to their same level."
- "I'm in a hard work environment"
- "When I was hired into my job I was told I would be one of two directors. When I started, my employees revolted so the job was changed and I was demoted to their same level."
- "Growing up here, my first language was Spanish and I didn't speak much English. I came from a small village and found myself in a big city. I was in a program for Spanish speakers but then that program was cancelled. and everything was in English. It was like a bomb had dropped. Classmates made racist remarks."
- "I work with people who have addiction problems. One client committed suicide after I and others at my clinic had seen this person. I was new to counseling and really needed input from my supervisor on how to deal with this tragedy."

## 1.3 Forgiveness and Healing

### 1.3.1 Resolved Experiences

- "I've learned I can let people go and it doesn't mean I hate them. This was a great realization—even though I don't let them back—I tell people about this and have to explain it a lot."
- "We forgave each other on the spot without saying another word about the incident. This taught me that forgiveness is a release even though sometimes triggers can bring back the incident in our minds we know we've forgiven."
- "One day I realized how much I was hurting *myself* and began to work on forgiving him; which I did."
- "I learned it was in my control to let it go - it's still up there today."
- "I realized I need to forgive these people who treated me so badly. I asked God how often I have to forgive them and the answer is "again and again."
- "I don't usually tell other people when they hurt me but I can always tell God and that's good because I'm forgiven and then challenged not to be that way anymore."
- "I'm forgiving him and myself and trying to start over."
- "Now I feel a greater wholeness and I think I can forgive others faster."
- "I recognize my own wound and I have learned to walk through my pain."
- "Before he passed, I felt like he had given me back my power."
- "I felt neglected by our mom, but as I grew older, I realized she did the best that she could. Forgiveness is a process, a feeling of insecurity as a child."
- "My son was able to give me the benefit of the doubt and that was very powerful to me."

- "Now I'll forgive you" or "you need to apologize in this certain way and then I'll forgive you." Now it's like releasing the partner of their misery right away for both of us."
- "Forgiveness over time was something that was really necessary for me to move forward in my life. I just realized that people make mistakes – that's life – and we learn from mistakes."
- "He's not in our life anymore today, but I have forgiven him in my heart."
- "I'm in recovery. My mom and sister have forgiven me for not being there for them. I didn't think that would happen so quick."
- "I've released my relationship with them but I no longer hold a grudge."
- "When he was near the end of his life, he became softer and was surprised that I wanted to be present. He said, 'I thought if we didn't all agree, then there wouldn't be love.'"
- "After talking to really smart people, I learned that being angry is OK and I was able to ask for help. I learned that I hated myself because I wanted to accomplish all this stuff that I hadn't magically been able to do yet."
- "There are some things that help speed it along, e.g. a prayer service I went to or people who will listen and not give advice. Patience does not quite describe what is needed: it took years. Now my ex and I can get together and have lunch without having my gut wrench. I am grateful. I have learned gratitude."
- "We have to get to know each other. Religion requires that we not carry grudges. This is how I found peace."
- "My father and I forgave each other. I forgave my stepmother. I forgave myself."
- "Bitterness will eat away at your heart. It is up to each of us to make life better. I have some tools such as prayer and meditation."
- "I have learned to be OK with differences. I have learned to not push the river, let it flow with me."
- "I had wanted to forgive my dad for years and then one day my heart just opened and forgiveness occurred."
- "I was relieved and thankful when the supervisor finally sat down with me to work through the emotions I was feeling."

### **.1.3.2 Unresolved Experiences**

- "I feel like I'm done but he doesn't want to be done. I'm going home tomorrow for Mother's Day and am worried about it. I have a good relationship with my mother and am mad at my father for how he treated her so it will be hard."
- "I went to visit her a few years ago and it started out okay but after a few days she hated my being there. She said, "Your presence is offensive to me." I've forgiven her for that, but it's harder to forgive myself."
- "Forgiveness was needed in many areas and I'm still working on it. It feels good when I can let it go."
- It does seem like forgiving other people is easier than forgiving myself which is something I still struggle with and am working towards. It's one of the reasons I'm here.

- Sometimes I still get angry and feel like it defined a lot of who I am as a person, so it seems that I'm not done with the process of forgiving, but sometimes I feel like there's no one to forgive.
- I am worried for my daughter." So, I wrote my daughter a letter, apologizing for butting in. A week later she sent back my letter unopened.
- I'm still very upset by the pain he caused my dad for decades. The unnecessary pain he has caused. He could be grateful for his wife and kids, who we are.
- My son asked, "Do you think about how we were raised?" I say, "I ask God for forgiveness daily." I beat myself up.
- My daughter is getting ready for college, and me and my husband have pep talks with her. I'm sad because I never got those.
- I'm still in the process even when I think it's been released. It's easy as a victim to lean back into that and use it as a reason things are a certain way.
- I thought that I had forgiven my dad but when I went back to his house I just exploded at him. I finally had to tell my mom what had happened.
- I need to be better about not getting angry and allow myself to forgive."

## 1.4 Forgiveness and Healing

### 1.4.1 Forgiving Others

- "We forgave each other on the spot without saying another word about the incident."
- "I've learned I can let people go and it doesn't mean I hate them. This was a great realization—even though I don't let them back—I tell people about this and have to explain it a lot."
- "I realized I need to forgive these people who treated me so badly."
- "I realized she did the best that she could"
- "I relapsed, my wife cheated on me, I was filled with hate. It can consume me. Forgiveness was needed in many areas and I'm still working on it. It feels good when I can let it go."
- "Before he passed, I felt like he had given me back my power."
- "I realized that if I didn't forgive him that my feelings of anger and aggression wouldn't go away."
- "The only way to do that was to recognize how bad he was hurting."
- "He was in his own cycle and if I continued to repress my anger, I would just create a new cycle. I wanted to break it."
- "I was able to forgive my sister because I want to have a relationship with her."
- "He's not in our life anymore today, but I have forgiven him in my heart."
- "I had to revisit that and now it is time for me to forgive because as a child I did not understand what was happening. I'm still not sure if I did forgive or if I just processed it. Something I still get angry and feel like it defined a lot of who I am as a person, so it seems that I'm not done with the process of forgiving, but sometimes I feel like there's no one to forgive."
- "A person I forgave was my father"

- "I finally blew up at a volunteer event and had to ask for forgiveness. The board that used to be all my friends fired me from the organization. I've released my relationship with them but I no longer hold a grudge."
- "Now my ex and I can get together and have lunch without having my gut wrench. I am grateful. I have learned gratitude."
- "My father and I forgave each other. I forgave my stepmother."
- "I wrote each of my three children a letter asking for forgiveness."
- "It was apparent that forgiveness of the supervisor and himself were at the core of his story but exactly how was not expressed."
- "I need to be better about not getting angry and allow myself to forgive."
- "The morning after I received the call, I heard a soft voice, 'Will you forgive me?' I did"

#### **.1.4.2 Self-Forgiveness**

- "I forgave myself."
- "I'm working on forgiving myself for breaking up my family."
- "...but it's harder to forgive myself."
- "I'm forgiving him and myself and trying to start over."
- "Once I saw that, I could work on forgiving myself."
- "I deal with self-forgiveness."
- "I have to forgive myself for hating racists."
- "Self-forgiveness is important."

#### **.1.4.3 Forgiveness from Others**

- "I was amazed how he was so eager to forgive me. He would say to people, "It wasn't her fault." My son found reason to see the best in me at such an early age. It was powerful to see how amazing he was. His action changed me. My son was able to give me the benefit of the doubt and that was very powerful to me."
- "I told my husband what had happened and how upset I was. Within 15 minutes he said "I forgive you." It just lifted me and released a lot of the tension."
- "My mom and sister have forgiven me for not being there for them. I didn't think that would happen so quick."

#### **.1.4.4 Using Tools and Resources for Healing**

- "Some time later I went to a workshop/class in the Southwest at the Pecos River. One of the activities involved riding a zip line down from a mountaintop. Before I jumped, my counselor advised me to leave my troubles on the mountaintop."
- "I don't usually tell other people when they hurt me but I can always tell God and that's good because I'm forgiven and then challenged not to be that way anymore."
- "My family is Christian, so we believe in forgiveness and we all worked on forgiving him."
- "I ask God for forgiveness daily."
- "There are some things that help speed it along, e.g. a prayer service I went to or people who will listen and not give advice."

- "Religion requires that we not carry grudges."
- "I have some tools such as prayer and meditation."

## 2 Question/Round 2: "What is one particular conflict in our society that you think could benefit from forgiveness?"

### 2.1 Problems with Prejudice

- "With gender and racial issues no one's hurting him; people are trying to deal with things."
- "The first thing I thought of was classism...I work in a very poor neighborhood and wonder how the people who live there judge me. I have a job and come in my own car and then leave. But I also judge people who live in 'mini mansions.'"
- "I have observed that religion - especially Christianity - didn't seem important on the coasts but I feel anti-religion hatred here although I've attended many churches. Maybe it's because there's less diversity here. I feel that the whole culture is oppressive and there's nowhere to go with questions."
- "Understanding trauma is huge. It can define lives for a long time. The Black Lives Matter vs Blue Lives Matter conflict is based on trauma."
- "I am a child of two Holocaust survivors who forgave the Nazis. I was taught not to talk badly of others; not to judge based on what other peoples' ancestors had done. I've been at conferences and seen others who carry the guilt and the judgement."
- "I worked in a women's shelter and the manager thought I had called her a racist term. I couldn't convince her that not only hadn't I done that but it wasn't even in my vocabulary."
- "People using religion to leave little room for forgiveness. They know God will forgive, but self-righteousness offers intolerance for others."
- "Disagreements with religion, sexuality, race. When someone says something that I don't agree with, it triggers pain in me."
- "For me, the biggest issue that has an impact on my life is race relations. As a white person who lived and worked in the North Side of Milwaukee my whole life, I feel like I've seen a lot of unique aspects of the issue."
- "I feel like it would be helpful if there were more forgiveness around communication mistakes that people often make – especially around identity. That whole area is expanding so widely – LGBTQIA and what is gender, sexuality, and preference. And there seems to be rapidly shifting ground as far as what is okay to say and how to address a person. Especially intergenerationally, there are a lot of missteps that people can make."
- "One conflict I'd like to address is between those who have power and those who don't. This leads to gaps between the rich and poor, abusing the land."
- "Rich and poor, men and women, drug addicts and alcoholics. They deserve forgiveness. It's actually a disease in your brain. It's hard to quit. People just look at you like you're a junkie."

- "Race."
- "Coming back to Milwaukee made me realize what it was to grow up in a white suburb with a restrictive housing code. I think it's important to give but also ask for forgiveness, just to acknowledge the power of what was done (in Milwaukee) and to remember what that was."
- "200 African Americans were marching for fair housing and by the time that they got downtown, 200 counter protesters formed. They marched for 200 straight days, wearing down that hate. I grew up in Milwaukee never knowing that story. People always seem to forget the parts of the story about the white protestors and the brains and not just bodies of the African American protestors when talking about it."
- "I come from an out-of-state area. There is a stigma attached to racism, alcoholism and mental illness. There are places to get help but most people don't know about them. My parents were racist. I have had to take my own kids out of my mother's house because of her racist comments. I don't want them to hear that."
- "There are so many things, such as 911 and the hate crimes against Muslims that need forgiveness to play a role. A lot of people haven't forgiven the perpetrators and continue to hate all Muslims."
- "Racism is one area where we need to see people for who they are, not judging people by the way they look."
- "I have thought a lot about white privilege. Those with such privilege that are angry about crime should realize their privilege and how different things are for those that are oppressed."
- "I recently watched the documentary 'Half the Sky' about the oppression of women throughout the world. I was impressed how some Somalian women were able to forgive the people who had committed terrible crimes against them."

## 2.2 Problems with Politics

### 2.2.1 The Election

- "If we look at the Trump situation, what is to be forgiven? Who's supposed to be forgiving—us or him?"
- "I want to understand those people who voted for Trump."
- "I have a co-worker. She's gay but voted for Trump. Her reason was, 'I want to retire early.' I still cannot get over this. I see greed as the worst of sins."
- "Specifically with Trump, with how many people embrace the partisanship, the hate, the cruelty toward underdogs. I'm still in shock he got into office. Maybe I'm naïve to think this hate and prejudice wouldn't build up like this. My husband voted for him. He believes he has something to offer. I can't have conversations with my husband about this."
- "I work in colleges and this election in particular, the sense of camaraderie that goes into hating either side isn't helping. I see the us VS them where it's 'all these or all of them.' I know that it can't really be this way."

#### **.2.2.2 Gun Violence**

- "Gun control issues—there's a place for forgiving—what about the source of the problem?"
- "I think our issues of gun violence is bad and I can forgive the shooter but people need to be angry to have voice to speak out and take action."
- "I think that an area of society that can definitely benefit from forgiveness involves mass shooters. I feel like in our society we see these people who do these actions as evil people who are just horrible. We dehumanize them. In reality, as much as they did do wrong, they are human, too."

#### **.2.2.3 Criminal Justice System**

- "Having a record makes it hard for people who are trying to do better."
- "The integration of people who have been incarcerated into the job market and just into everyday life."
- "One group that would benefit from forgiveness is those who have been released from prison. It is hard for them to get a second chance, to get a job, to get a place to live, even if they have changed their lives. Meal programs help but people are also anxious to get a job or to find an apartment."

#### **.2.2.4 Additional Political Problems**

- "Illegal immigration problem. I think we forget that none of us are from here except from Native Americans. I believe that people have so much hate based on wrong assumptions. There's a lot of labeling and assumptions for the outsiders."
- "I worked in mergers and acquisitions and now in landscaping. Managing workers is a big issue - especially about immigration. It's so polarizing and no-one wants to talk about it."
- "Some decisions about the government issues..."
- "There have been severe political differences among my family in Wisconsin over the years."
- "Milwaukee has no rape crisis center like most big cities. Just in the last few months, the government passed a law to allow for rape advocates at Aurora. Most service providers there are survivors themselves but they still fight each other for funding and then the money doesn't get to where it needs to go."
- "I think education could benefit from forgiveness – especially Milwaukee city school systems."
- "For me, broken families and custody battles. There's a battle always going on, with anger, not taking the children into account."

### **3 Question/Round 3: Where do you feel pulled in different directions when trying to use forgiveness in your personal life?**

#### **3.1 Issues Forgiving Others**

- "Based on my story I shared earlier I turned the page and forgave the church leader."



- "Generally, with other people I have a fairly easy time forgiving."
- "I have forgiven people for some pretty horrible things they've done to me and others."
- "I have the opportunity to manage people. Sometimes it's like raising kids. It's been interesting working with salespeople. I try to coach them to understand their jobs."
- "My sister is trying to divide my family. I'm mad at her but trying to forgive and keep taking the high road."
- "White people are given so much grace but when does it end?"
- "One struggle I have is trusting that God will handle the injustices - not just at the end of times but present day. It doesn't feel fast enough for me when I think about racial wrongs."
- "When someone wrongs me, my first reaction is not to forgive. But when I wrong someone else, I want forgiveness."
- "What boundaries do I need in order to renew a relationship after forgiveness? I work toward that, especially with people who need to be in my life [specifically parents]."
- "My daughter wants me to 'earn' her forgiveness but I don't know what that looks like for her."
- "As a child of Holocaust survivors, I struggle with the question of whether I have the right to forgive the offspring of perpetrators or if it's my responsibility to continue a legacy."
- "My father was an alcoholic and angry. I thought I had forgiven him."
- "I think it's really easy to forgive people I don't know well – students or coworkers or someone I don't know very well. When they're having a bad day or something that isn't right, I think "oh, well, maybe something happened to them." I give those people a lot of slack. I can't do that in my own household with my husband and my kids, because I do know them and where they're coming from."
- "It takes me a while to step back. My father still says things to my mom jokingly about something like 'dumb females' and I step back and just say, 'Ok, that's inappropriate. You don't just attack and dishonor someone's identity.'"
- "With my brother-in-law, I think I've forgiven him a bunch of times but then I always wind up taking it back when I see him because he'll say something again that brings up that same hurt and anger."
- "Seeing it through God's perspective of forgiveness is what I need to feel forgiveness for other people, as well."
- "There is one person on this planet who can flip me into my lizard brain so fast – my sister. I struggle with her. She is my test case for my ability to forgive."
- "With my husband, I lose my sense of self when he gets verbally abusive... he apologizes but I don't think he knows what he's apologizing for."
- "I never wanted to forgive anyone. Hatred and anger are easier. I'm learning I need to forgive because it's a dangerous spiral that can take you down."
- "I get so angry at young people who commit crimes."
- "Why isn't it that easy for me to forgive my mom? ...My husband comes from trauma. We hurt each other. We are learning and we keep working on it."

- "I have my issues with my dad. Now that he's gotten older, I very much forgive him for all the drinking which made my childhood horrible."
- "To see the lack of acknowledgement in my personal life is really hard when I see that the racism and segregation continues."
- "Loving someone with an addiction and the daily forgiveness and reaching a point of wanting to let go but still trying to hold them accountable."
- "I like things to be out in the open but my husband wants to just forgive and move on and I'm left dealing with all the details to work out."
- "I got mugged and when the gun was pulled on me, my first thought was, "How am I going to forgive you for this?"
- "My boyfriend cheated on me and I wanted advice on whether to forgive him."
- "I got divorced about five years ago. I would stay away from my ex but just be friends. It has been on and off. We keep getting back into a pattern after 29 years of his verbal abuse."
- "I can forgive people but sometimes I have to let the relationship go."
- "We pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others." So I have to take a step."
- "I keep thinking I haven't done anything wrong, so what is there to forgive. But I do blame others and I need to realize that blame is avoiding taking action on forgiving."
- "My best friend does some things that I don't like- I need to forgive her and help her mature."
- "I went to a religious grade school and had terrible teachers that were not knowledgeable about how to teach – I was shamed a lot and disrespected, put down. I have been bitter and angry at those teachers."

## 3.2 Issues with Self-forgiveness

- "I need to forgive myself for not being kind to my 101-year old mother-in-law; she is a survivor of the Holocaust."
- "I don't understand why I have a hard time forgiving myself over smaller or lighter things. I guess when I forgive others I can remove myself from the equation; but when it's yourself you can't really do this."
- "I've gotten better and not harming myself for what I've done."
- "I usually think of self-healing when I'm faced with a forgiveness issue."
- "My relationship with my dad is my way of self-forgiveness."
- "...after years of beating myself up my friends told me to forgive myself."

## 3.3 Proposed Solutions

### .3.3.1 Cutting Ties

- "I have to leave it."
- "I can forgive people but sometimes I have to let the relationship go."
- "Building healthy boundaries will help me heal."
- "I want to move away to another state and start over. I want to be treated as an equal. Maybe I will move away to someplace warm."

### **.3.3.2 Having Empathy**

- "Recently when she became vulnerable I began to show compassion. I forgot about the dementia being an illness and didn't understand her harshness in that way."
- "I just don't think he knows how to communicate nicely because as a child he was never communicated nicely to. Remembering that is what helps me forgive."
- "I feel pulled in different directions when I'm feeling angry, but also realize that I need to put aside my pride. I try to see it from God's perspective. He forgave everyone all their sins."
- "We pray, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others.' So I have to take a step. There is a reciprocity in forgiveness."
- "She grew up differently than I, with different privileges, I need to understand better."

### **3.4 Ongoing Struggles**

- "With myself I make bad decisions and I have a hard time forgiving and I am hard on myself."
- "I'm mad at her but trying to forgive and keep taking the high road. I always feel pulled in that situation."
- "I try to live in grace. White people are given so much grace but when does it end?"
- "It doesn't feel fast enough for me when I think about racial wrongs."
- "It's easier not to think about it, but much more effective to engage in the tension."
- "...it feels never ending. I wish she'd go to a therapist!"
- "I struggle with the question of whether I have the right to forgive the offspring of perpetrators or if it's my responsibility to continue a legacy."
- "I just hold on to it and it can grow and grow. It's hard for me to forgive the people I love the most."
- "I think that pulls me in different directions – trying to let go of that when I constantly revisit the issue. It's difficult."
- "These are my torn feelings. I would give her a kidney, but I don't want to have conversations with her."
- "I've even gone so far as to wish he would die. Then my life would be my own."
- "I want to not judge, because it's not my place to forgive them. I'm sad for them. That makes me feel hopelessness."
- "At times I point my ire at him, I can get really angry with him which is hard due to him having an illness."
- "How do you deal with the daily offenses?"
- "The tension of know[ing] if forgiveness is good and beautiful but still wanting justice."
- "I'm trying to do forgiveness his way but it's really challenging."
- "I have to leave. It is like giving up a bad habit. Maybe I can use forgiveness so that I am free to go."
- "But I do blame others and I need to realize that blame is avoiding taking action on forgiving."

- "I have been bitter and angry at those teachers. I need to work on forgiveness."

## 4 Connected Conversation

### 4.1 Messages of Support and/or General Suggestions or Aspirations for the Future

- "With your story about your friend I believe it's wonderful that it just washed off. I think we're human beings."
- "We should do these discussion circles at work."
- "Admitting vulnerability is important because it's freeing."
- "Young children should learn forgiveness. We would have fewer problems in society because it carries on to generations."
- "We should have a model for forgiveness without a religious component."
- "Forgiveness is not just personal work; it's an action."
- "You have to feel your way through forgiveness, not think through it. Slow down and know that you're not the only one in the universe."
- "You're meant to heal yourself and only then others."
- "Forgiveness feels very natural, and like it's a choice."
- "Anger prohibits forgiveness."
- "The time it takes to forgive is different for different people."
- "We're all harder on ourselves than others but I don't really know why. I think it has to do with seeing the effect of your choices on other people."
- "There are consequences to forgiveness."
- "It is good to talk and exhale, it is therapeutic."
- "To know your wound and talking back give you power."
- "Everyone experiences struggles."
- "If we don't get rid of hate, it's really hard to forgive."
- "I think that sometimes it's important to accept people as they are in order to forgive."
- "Forgiveness is more of a cyclical process than linear."
- "Generational issues can be healed through constellation therapy."
- "What would it be like if we could all be like Westly Clark Jr. at Standing Rock? That acknowledgement of truth makes forgiveness so much easier."
- "We can't expect everyone else to navigate by our own personal fixed reference points."
- "There is hope. I am aware of my white privilege, what I have taken for granted and say, 'Hang in there, girl!' Your presence is a gift."
- "Experiencing racism requires an ongoing process of forgiveness."
- "It is important to be immediately forgiving."
- "It is important to get to know people from other cultures., to spend time together, to eat together. I have had so many experiences in my life, so many people God has put into my life. You have to be open to the new."
- "Sometimes there's never a way to understand why."
- "We need to forgive ourselves for our biases."

## 4.2 Questions, Hopes, and/or Resolutions based on Personal Experiences/Trauma

- "I found that hanging on to anger just hurts myself. I have decided to let go of anger."
- "Sometimes I think I just have to ask myself better questions to understand why something bad happened. An example would be 'I wonder what it was like to be you'."
- "I need to hang out with the 'have-nots'. I need to build empathy with others."
- "I have to make it a healthy environment because no-one else will."
- "Thinking about boundaries. This is my life, how much do I want to let you in?"
- "I sometimes wonder if forgiveness really isn't natural."
- "My husband is Jewish, too, and there's a lot of trauma and sadness. We need to break the cycle of pain."
- "How do you separate people from the work culture and forgive individuals?"
- "I'm hoping little by little people will start apologizing."
- "I don't regret sending the letter or talking to my grandson. But I'm glad I apologized. Alcoholism is a family issue."
- "My younger brother is recovering. He falls sometimes."
- "How can I care? How can I bring more forgiveness, compassion and empathy into the world? Find healing through helping. How do I expand that caring? How do I bring more light into a dark world, like a flashlight? I don't want to bring darkness but to open myself to something greater than self. I want to be in the light."
- "I will defend them. They were always there for me."
- "I am thankful my children don't have hate in their hearts."

## 5 Parting Words

### 5.1 Feelings of Gratitude and Appreciation

- "I appreciate hearing everyone's stories."
- "It makes my heart feel stronger and more resilient to hear others' stories. It makes life richer."
- "It's good to be in a group with other ages. The perspective of older people is a positive."
- "It felt good to tell my story for the first question. I had been holding it back for a while now. Thank you, everybody."
- "I feel a sense of admiration for everyone in this group. No one had to be here, but here we are. We can go home with what we've learned and affect others. I feel really encouraged to have a conversation like the one we had tonight."
- "I'm really glad that I came. I didn't know what it was about and it helps me think about how I am as a person and how I've lived my life."
- "I'm really glad I came tonight. For me it was more a selfish issue – more of my needing to forgive myself than other people."
- "I'm really impressed by all of the voices I heard tonight. I think all the voices that we've heard tonight show that we highly value forgiveness and also understand that we all struggle with it. I'm particularly struck by what another participant shared about breaking a cycle."

- "I'm glad I came here tonight."
- "Thank-you all for sharing. It was great to hear your stories and perspectives."
- "I am grateful to be here. Thanks for sharing."
- "I am grateful for the sharing and for the chance to do deep listening, without judging, to hear stories and listen to the two speakers."
- "I am grateful for the deep listening."

## 5.2 Lessons Learned

- "Anytime I tried to hurt someone, it's because I was hurting. I don't want to be a hurt person anymore."
- "Forgiveness is more about feelings than about rationalization."
- "I talk a good game, but I think I've stopped doing the work."
- "There's a connection between forgiveness and timing."
- "Forgiveness is a journey"
- "Be open to yourself"
- "Connectedness, when I need to forgive, I don't feel shame."
- "It felt good to tell my story for the first question. I had been holding it back for a while now."
- "I've learned that giving value to people – respecting them first and foremost – makes forgiveness possible."
- "It's about me learning how to forgive myself so I can spread that ability to my family and bring peace."
- "I do it (forgiveness) for myself. Sometimes I'll feel like I'm not there. I need to be kind to myself in the process."
- "Your 4-step model for self-forgiveness. I know intellectually I'm responsible for my own happiness. It's a practice. I start a process to rewire my brain."
- "I need to forgive myself more than anything. I keep trying to play catch-up. I need to start dealing with it. If I can't forgive myself I can't forgive others."
- "Bringing the word forgiveness back to my consciousness. Being gentler with myself. I've found the older I get, the easier that gets."
- "I'm trying to figure out the components of forgiveness."
- "I will remember that forgiveness is a journey, not a ritual moment. It takes time. I will remember how people can change, especially Arno's example of being a leader in a hate movement to being a leader in forgiveness, due in part, to the power of people around him."