## Touchstones for Conversation

**Called to welcome others as Christ**. According to the Rule of Saint Benedict, all people are to be “received like Christ.” We invite you to give and receive welcome by your words and actions towards others in the group.

**Called to be present to each other.** We all lead busy lives; that is why our time together is so important. As much as possible, focus your attention and energies on being engaged with those around you. Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.

**Called to share and to keep silent.** What is offered in this circle is by invitation, not demand. As we read in Ecclesiastes, there is “a time to be silent, and a time to speak.” No one is ever forced to respond to any question. We honor the right of each individual to decide when he or she feels called to share.

**Called to honor each voice.** We invite you to share from your own unique story. No individual speaks for an entire group or a whole profession. This is a space to set aside competition and to celebrate the different ways God works in each of our lives.

**Called to listen with the “ear of your heart,”** according to the Rule of Benedict. This is a space for listening and learning from each other, not for critiquing or offering advice. While the group may provide support, we are not here to “fix” or “save” each other. Offer questions instead of counsel.

**Called to reserve judgment and turn to wonder**. Whenever people interact, disagreements naturally arise. But we invite you to turn from judgmental attitudes which stifle communication, to an attitude of wonder which opens the heart. If you find yourself reacting strongly, turn inward and ask yourself: “*I wonder why this person feels this way. I wonder why I feel such a strong reaction. I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself*.”

**Called to respect our differences**. Our time together is a conversation, not a debate. We invite you to learn from others and from yourself, to tap the sources of wisdom in the group and in your own heart.

**Called to keep confidentiality**. Vocation is a deeply personal topic, and we respect the sacredness of our stories: our fears and failures, sorrows and successes. The circle of the group provides a space that is open to share within, but closed from sharing outside. What is shared in the circle stays in the circle.

**Called to pray**. When the group leaves from this space, we invite you to hold each other’s lives and stories in prayer until you meet again. Following the Benedictine rule of “ora et labora” (prayer and work), we hope that your time together will enrich both your prayer and your work when you are apart.

**When Someone Deeply Listens To You**

When someone deeply listens to you
it is like holding out a dented cup
you've had since childhood
and watching it fill up with
cold, fresh water.
When it balances on top of the brim,
you are understood.
When it overflows and touches your skin,
you are loved.

When someone deeply listens to you
the room where you stay
starts a new life
and the place where you wrote
your first poem
begins to glow in your mind's eye.
It is as if gold has been discovered!

When someone deeply listens to you
your bare feet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.

— John Fox