



Protocol for Serial Witness

by

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Purpose

- Processing an experience that evokes complicated and competing emotions, thoughts, and theology
- To build community around a shared experience
- To open spaces for difficult conversations that tend to be avoided

Room Set-up

Circle of chairs- one for each person. No empty chairs in the circle.

Time:

No more than two hours

Materials

Laptop computer for recorded music

2 minute sand-timers

Chalice (matches, candle)

Preparation for Facilitator(s)

- Even more important that setting up the room is being in a centered space to facilitate. What do you need to feel centered? How can you make room for yourself before and after you lead this process?
- If the topic at hand is particularly difficult or triggering for you, can you arrange to have someone co-facilitate?
- We suggest you pre-plan 3-4 questions for a two-hour block of sharing. The best questions are open-ended and invite perspective taking. In the notes below we offer some suggestions for each round (opening/follow up).

Facilitation Agenda

Set up	Set up room, play music as people arrive
0:00-0:10	Welcome & Centering
0:10-0:15	Setting up the exercise
0:15-0:55	First Round/Opening questions
0:55-1:05	Break
1:05-1:55	Second Round/Follow-up Questions
1:55-2:00	Closing

Facilitation Notes & Suggestions

1. Greet guests, by person, while gathering. Doing this creates a connection between you and each person, and also lowers the anxiety for anxious participants.
2. Play music as people are entering the room.
 - a. Note: Do not underestimate the importance of creating the space with the music. Does this group need quiet, centering music? Inspiring music? Music that gives energy? We encourage you to use an eclectic playlist that reflects the cultures and backgrounds of the folks in the room – it is one of the easiest ways to help people feel included.

0:00-0:10 Welcome & Centering

1. Introduce yourself as a facilitator. Ask each person to say his/her name ONLY.
2. Create a worshipful space. Ask participants to center themselves (feet on floor, close eyes, etc.) Take at least FIVE deep breaths.
3. To the group: “Repeat after me: I (facilitator silently counts to three between each word). Am (pause). Here (pause). Now.” Repeat this chant for about 1 to 1.5 minutes. At about one minute, the facilitator should stop chanting aloud, and allow the group to fade out in a natural fashion.
4. Light the chalice. Read these words:

“Spirit of life and love, we have gathered here in search of answers to hard questions. We have come in search of understanding, in search of community. We have come in search of hope and healing.

Let this be a place not only of searching, but of discovery. Let this be a place of not only learning, but of wisdom. Let this be a place not only of meeting, but connection.

This is our hope, our prayer: that we may create here a circle of love, ever expanding, ever growing, as we seek out the Divine, whose highest name is always love.”

[Adapted from Sue Ayer. 1997 UUMA Worship Materials Collection]

0:10-0:15 **Setting up the exercise: Serial Witness**

Explain, briefly, the question that is on the agenda for the meeting [*Ex: We are here tonight to talk about our thoughts and feelings about the killing of black men in our society.*]

Explain why we use this process.

We are using conversation format because we want to be sure that everyone has a chance to speak and to be heard. It is especially painful when we gather to talk about inequality if patterns of inequality show up in our process and are not acknowledged. This process helps us create a structure for each other, to make sure everyone has equal time and attention of the group.

Explain how it works.

There are a few rules that guide our conversation:

1. Only one person speaks at a time, and only when you are holding the 2-minute sand timer. We use two timers in case the person speaking does not wish to use the full 2 minutes; the time can finish running while the next person uses the second timer. (See <https://vimeo.com/114347471> for an example of how to use the sandtimers.)
2. No interruptions while another person is speaking.
3. If you are not ready to speak when the timer comes to you, ask to pass, and we'll come back to you after everyone else has spoken.
4. Confidentiality. You are not allowed to share the stories other people share unless they give you specific permission to do so.
5. Double confidentiality. Because we want folks to feel free to take risks and share what is on their hearts and minds, we also

ask that you not approach people about comments they make today to discuss further or learn more.

As you share:

1. Speak from your heart. Talk about your feelings and emotions. Trust the moment and be as honest as you can.
2. Listen without judgment. Keep an open mind, even if you are in disagreement with what is being said.
3. Speak spontaneously. Do not “plan ahead” what you are going to say. If you are planning ahead, you are not listening to the speaker.

0:15 – 0:55 First Round/Opening Questions

Ask one question at a time, and go around the circle until everyone who wants to answer has had a chance. (If you offer all the questions at once, different people will choose the “easier” questions and avoid going deeper. Don’t give them that option.) After 3 pre-determined rounds, you might invite participants to respond to insights or new thoughts that were sparked by another speaker, saying something like, “Are there other insights you’d like to share with the group?” [Still, no cross-talking.]

Suggested Questions:

1. How is your soul (humanness) feeling now? Or,
2. What feelings/emotions are causing you tension now? Or,
3. What are you struggling with now?
4. What are you noticing about...
5. Other questions....

0:55-1:05 Facilitator should check-in with group. Stretch, bathroom break.

1:05-1:55 Second Round/Follow-up Questions

Follow-up questions should ask for specific points of view, or to identify specific needs or actions.

Suggested Questions:

1. What do you need in order to move forward (tonight, this week, to stay engaged with this problem?)
2. Where are you seeing hope?
3. What would you like to see from others in our community?
4. What does progress look like to you?
5. Other questions....

***Open Forum Option**

Consider if, instead of more than one second round of questions, it is appropriate to move into other forms of discussion. Always stay within the framework of “listening not judging”. If you decide to open up the discussion, make sure that everyone has an opportunity to share a “next steps” or “take away” type of reflection. End discussion with five minutes remaining, to complete process with Closing.

1:55-2:00 Closing

Reminder about confidentiality AND double-confidentiality (you may not approach a person about what s/he said unless said person gives you permission to do so.)

Invite people to hold hands and hold each other in their hearts as you share these closing words:

“Loving spirit of this very moment,
We are thankful that you are with us during these moments
of wondering and doubt,
When we forget that dreams are not born in an instant,
But must be nurtured,
Must be chosen over and over.
When the world is telling us that we are dreaming too large,
Too wild, too unrealistic, or even
Too small...
Remind us, gentle patient Spirit,

That any dream worth waiting for
Is worth working toward.”

[adapted from Marta I. Valentin, Voices from the Margins]

Blessed be. Amen. Go in peace.

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Sources:

Peggy McIntosh, Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (S.E.E.D.)
Drinking and Driving in Horizon, A Research Study; University of Alberta and Blue
Quills First Nation’s College.
Beloved Conversations: Meditations on Race & Ethnicity; The Fahs Collaborative.