If someone pays attention
Too the part of me that struggles to know God
My search intensifies
The questing spirit grows bold enough
To claim its path
If someone believes with me
In the amazement of grace,
Prays with me, and reminds me
Of God's tenderness,
I live more thoroughly and bravely
In sacred time

OASIS: Clergy/Pastor Groups

Invitation

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I sha'n't be gone long.--You come too.

From Robert Frost, The Pasture

Where are the safe places for clergy/ministers/church leaders to share 'the state of their souls' especially when their soul feels 'rubbled over.' Parker Palmer calls these places 'circles of trust.' He suggests that we know how to set up all kinds of places:

* We know how to create spaces that invite the *intellect* to show up, analyzing reality, parsing logic, and arguing its case; such spaces can be found, for example, in universities.

*We know how to create spaces that invite the *emotions* into play, reacting to injury, expressing anger and celebrating joy: they can be found in therapy groups.

*We know how to create spaces that invite the *will* to emerge, consolidating energy and effort on behalf of a shared goal: they can be found in task forces and committees.

*We certainly know how to create spaces that invite the *ego* to put in an appearance, polishing its image, protecting its turf and demanding its rights; they can be found wherever we go!

*But we know very little about creating spaces that invite the *soul* to make itself known. Apart from the natural world, such spaces are hard to find—and we seem to place little value on preserving the soul spaces in nature.

Jesus so wonderfully lives this reality. When tempted by despair, he retreats to the garden. When tempted by pride (after the feeding of 5000 and the peoples push to

make him king) he retreats to the mountain. In both situations his mind, emotions, will and ego tempt him away from the Belovedness that his soul knows in God.

Palmer doesn't suggest that the intellect, emotions, will, and ego are irrelevant to inner work. Rather he suggests that operating independently; these faculties will not take us where the soul wants to go. But when guided by the soul these faculties become vital allies on the journey toward an undivided life – undivided between soul and role. How do we remind our minds, emotions, wills, and egos that they were created to serve the soul?

The desire of this clergy support group is to build a circle of trust, a place that is safe for the soul to emerge. The facilitator's role is to honour and hold the individuals and group accountable to that goal.

Facilitation Description

As a facilitator I will invite us to slow down, do more with less, and pay attention to the rhythm of the soul as described above. Other guidelines are suggested below and we will discuss these our first time together. I will participate as a full group member. We will start by sharing our life stories.

Clergy Support Group Guidelines

1. Commit to meet monthly for a four month period at which time reflection and discernment will be invited concerning continued involvement. Honorarium for four month period will be $80.00 (monthly) collected in advance. Please contact me if the honorarium is a hardship as we have a contingency fund to assist. "Ask and it shall be given." Each time will be about 2 hours in length. Of course, refreshments will be served.

2. While we seek to establish a safe, confidential and trusting space for the soul to emerge, we invite each participant to honor their own boundaries.

3. Listen carefully and contemplatively to others without taking over from the speaker, trying to fix (either persons or systems) or give advice. Try to speak in the first person about your experience.

4. Respect each member's personal theology, political beliefs and so on. Do not attempt to convince others of the correctness of your beliefs.

5. Observe confidentiality around shared experience: What is said in the space remains in the space. Three refinements to this:

a. If material is common knowledge outside the room, it need not be considered confidential; however prudence and charity may indicate that you let it rest anyhow.

b. Individual members may speak about their own material outside of the group if and when they choose to do so, and not at the invitation of another.

c. In reflective and debriefing times, observations of a general nature may be made, without names and details.

6. We covenant to pray for each other.