

## Circle Process

*From Ron Kraybill & Evelyn Wright, The Little Book of Cool Tools for Hot Topics, Good Books, New York, 2006. PAGES 14-17*

‘The oldest and simplest of all group processes ... variations ... appear in cultures around the world.’

‘The group sits in a circle. The leader or ‘circle keeper’ states a focusing question or topic. Then the leader passes a “talking piece” – any object that is easy to hold, such as a stone, a feather, a crystal, a stick or piece of carved wood, even a pen – to the person sitting next to him or her. The speaker addresses the group while others listen in complete silence. When the speaker is finished, the speaker passes the talking piece to the next person. The talking piece makes its way around the circle – most speak but one or two choose to “pass” – and returns to the leader.’

### Process

- Introduce purpose and explain process
- Set ground rules, eg. speak only when holding talking piece, be respectful in speaking and listening, be fair in your use of time, be gentle with yourself and pass if you wish. Maybe: use ‘I’ statements, listen to others rather than mentally prepare your own comments.
- Suggest a theme: What I hope to see us doing regarding...; One hope and one fear I have regarding...; A particular concern I bring to this meeting is...
- Leader may want to go first to model the process.
- It may be helpful to designate a timekeeper
- If you go around more than once, later rounds often go deeper
- Can be helpful to suggest a focus for each round, eg. 1. My views on the issue, 2. Fears regarding the issue, 3. Hopes for the situation

### Strengths

- Easy, simple
- Tight structure reduces likelihood of blowups
- Allow a wide variety of views to be expressed
- All members sit as equals
- Encourages thoughtful rather than reactive responses

### Concerns

- Can be time consuming
- Continuity issues, eg. people sometimes respond to points made several speakers back
- On its own may not bring the group to consensus. Though the leader could announce the next topic will be ‘proposals that might bring us to consensus’. Or suggest a proposal for consensus and invite responses in the next round.

### Sequencing

- An excellent first tool to ease into a topic
- If a decision is desired without taking a lot of time, it could be followed by voting, or appointing a sub-group to bring a recommendation for a later vote.

Role Play: There is a sense that people here are feeling tired and burnt out. Should we cut back on the number of ministries / programs that we run?