**Small Group Ministry**

**Group Session Plan**

**Loving With Integrity**

**Opening Words**

We gather this day in expectation and in hope. To this gathered circle we bring memories and connections, hopes and fears and aspirations. May we renew again that fellowship which is deepened and enriched by our sharing. May we be reminded again of the wider horizons of our human community. May we hold one another in that esteem that makes family of us all.

**Check-in/Sharing**

**Topic/Activity**

Over the years, I have met people who have made a very human claim on me by making known their need to be loved. For a long time, my response was instant and reflexive, born of the "oughts" I had absorbed: `Of course you need to be loved. Everyone does. And I love you.'

It took me a long time to understand that although everyone needs to be loved, I cannot be the source of that gift to everyone who asks me for it. There are some relations in which I am capable of love and others in which I am not. To pretend otherwise, to put out promissory notes I am unable to honor, is to damage my own integrity and that of the person in need -- all in the name of love.....

Yes, we are created in and for community, to be there, in love, for one another. But community cuts both ways: when we reach the limits of our own capacity to love, community means trusting that someone else will be available to the person in need.

Parker J. Palmer, from *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*

"Love one another...." For many people of faith, "love" represents one of the highest of human ideals. We can be very hard on ourselves when we feel that we have fallen short in our attempts to love. Yet we also know how hard it can be, and how false it can feel, to try to force ourselves to be loving.

1. Palmer says that there may be relations within which we are incapable of love, and we should not pretend otherwise. Do you agree? What is meant here by "love"?
2. Have you ever had to refuse to meet another's need for love? When did you realize you were not "capable of love" with this person? Did you let the other person know? How did you feel? How did the other person respond?
3. Has anyone ever refused to love you? Was your need then met elsewhere?
4. Are your communities large and loving enough so that no one is left out? When you are not "capable of love" with someone, can you trust your community to somehow meet their need?

**Likes and Wishes**

**Closing Words** As we leave this circle, may we carry one another in our hearts. And may the fellowship that we have shared expand our hearts, strengthen our resolve and carry us forward into tomorrow.

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