



# Earth & Soul

reawakening to the sacredness of Earth and every human being

## Threshold Community: A Guide to House Gatherings

*A Resource from EARTH & SOUL*

(A Celtic Initiative of Study, Spiritual Practice, & Compassionate Action inspired by the teachings of John Philip Newell)

### Greeting & Welcome

- *honoring the presence of everyone in the circle with a simple gesture or word*
- *then a brief check-in from everyone gathered*

### Lighting a Candle & Offering a Prayer of Awareness

- *followed by a moment of silence*

### Words from Scripture

- *after which a chant or piece of meditative music is played*

### A Reading from Sacred Earth Sacred Soul

- *to be read aloud a few times slowly & reflectively*

### Silence

- *a time to ponder what is stirring within us from the Words of Scripture and the Reading*

### Sacred Listening

- *in small groups to share what has been calling our inner attention in the Silence*

### Shared Reflection

- *in the whole group to bring anything we wish from the Silence & the Sacred Listening*
- *followed by a brief pause to hold in our hearts all that we have heard from one another*

### A Spiritual Practice of Gratitude & Commitment

- *in which each person in the circle expresses in a few words what they are grateful for and what they are feeling committed to in a new way*

### A Prayer of Thanks

- *after which the candlelight is extinguished*

### Closing Words

- *in which we say, 'Namaste' (meaning 'the divine in me honors the divine in you')*

*\*Further notes for use in facilitating house gatherings can be found on the following two pages. Both the 'Guide' and 'Further Notes' are simply intended as a resource. Earth & Soul believes in the value of House Gatherings, but we don't want to over-define them or claim them as 'ours' in a prescriptive sort of way. Each gathering will find its own uniqueness of spirit and practice.*

# Further Notes for Use in Facilitating House Gatherings

## Greeting & Welcome

- whether we gather virtually or physically, the facilitator of the House Gathering honors everyone's presence with a simple word or gesture of greeting (like placing one's hand over one's heart as a sign of being attentive to the beat of the Sacred in each other)
- then everyone is invited to check in by very briefly saying how they are doing
- after which you can decide together who will read the following (if it hasn't already been decided in advance):
  - o Prayer of Awareness
  - o Words from Scripture
  - o Reading from *Sacred Earth Sacred Soul*
  - o Prayer of Thanks

## Lighting a Candle & Offering a Prayer of Awareness

- if you are gathered physically there will be just one candle to light but if you are gathered virtually you might want to invite everyone to have a candle
- a Prayer of Awareness can be spoken spontaneously, written by someone in the group, or chosen from any prayer or poetry resource book, including one of JPN's prayer books:
  - o *Sounds of the Eternal*
  - o *Celtic Benediction*
  - o *Praying with the Earth*
  - o *Celtic Prayers from Iona*

## Words from Scripture

- a verse or just a few words of Scripture can be read from the Bible or from the scriptures of any spiritual tradition. (You might want to choose scriptural sentences that are used in one of JPN's prayer books or in his 'Celtic Treasure: Daily Scriptures & Prayers')
  - o Examples: "Do not be afraid. I am with you always." Matthew 28:10, 20  
"Remember God deep in your soul with humility and reverence." Quran-The Heights 7.205  
"Wait for God, be strong and let your heart take courage, wait for God." Psalm 27:14
- after the Words of Scripture are read, quiet music (5-8 minutes) is played or a chant is used from one of JPN's CD's:
  - o *Sounds of the Eternal: Meditative Chants & Prayers*
  - o *Chanting for Peace: Meditative Chants & Prayers*

## A Reading from *Sacred Earth Sacred Soul* (by John Philip Newell: Harper One 2021)

- *Sacred Earth Sacred Soul* is the text for the House Gatherings
- choose a very short excerpt of wisdom from the book such as the following and read it aloud slowly and reflectively a few times. Here are examples of passages that have been used:
  - o Examples:
    - "What is deepest in us is of God. Every child, every woman, every man, and every life-form is in essence divine." (pg. 23 *Sacred Earth Sacred Soul*)
    - "Everything is sacred, says Eriugena, but we live in a state of forgetfulness of what is deepest in us and in everything that has being." (pg. 88 *Sacred Earth Sacred Soul*)
- the House Gathering is different from a book group, so we don't study a whole chapter or an extended passage from the book every time we gather. Rather, we use a very short passage as a way of reflecting together, very slowly moving through the book. It is a way of further nurturing study, spiritual practice, and compassionate action in the context of community
- this is a spiritual practice, so the passage chosen should be a sentence such as: "The sacred is in each newborn child" rather than, "Around 50 CE a shift began to occur in parts of the Celtic world." In other words, the passage is for reflection rather than information

## Silence

- *lead into the silence by letting the group know how long it will be. Don't be afraid of silence. It is the womb in which new awareness can stir from our depths. So, the longer the better. Ten minutes is a good place to begin and invites everyone to listen deeply to what is stirring within. It is important as a facilitator to nurture this way of being together and to know the gift of silence*
- *Invite people to pay attention to a word or phrase and repeat it silently as a way of listening*
- *Provide some guidance for the silence:*
  - o *Come back to your breath as a way of staying present*
  - o *Look out at nature*
  - o *Some may want to journal*
  - o *Simply sit quietly as you pay attention to what is stirring within you*

## Sacred Listening

- *allow 15 minutes in small groups of 3 to 4*
- *this is primarily a time of listening to one another rather than conversation. What has been stirring in your hearts during the Silence? Take it in turn to share. It can again be helpful to place your hand on your heart as a sign of deep attentiveness to one another. Allow for times of silence in and between the sharing*

## Shared Reflection

- *a brief time in the whole group to hear anything that people would like to bring from the Silence and Sacred Listening. This is not a 'report' from the small groups. It is simply an opportunity to do more listening together and to share anything that is particularly calling our inner attention*
- *finish this time by pausing in silence to hold in our hearts all that we have heard from one another*

## A Spiritual Practice of Gratitude & Commitment

- *allow space for each person to share in a few words (or perhaps just in one word which represents their gratitude & commitment) what they are grateful for and what they are feeling committed to in a new way*

## A Prayer of Thanks

- *a Prayer of Thanks can be spoken spontaneously, written by someone in the group, or chosen from any prayer or poetry resource book, including one of JPN's prayer books (listed above)*
- *after which the candlelight is extinguished*

## Closing Words

- *in which we honor each other by saying, 'Namaste' (the ancient Sanskrit salutation which means 'the divine in me honors the divine in you')*

## Recommendations:

- There will occasionally be sample House Gatherings led by Cami Twilling via Zoom if you would like to gain some experience before leading your own group. These will be listed on the Resources page of the Earth & Soul website (or you can connect with another House Gathering that you are in contact with as well). It is our hope that each House Gathering will be unique while reflecting the shared vision of Earth & Soul for communities of study, spiritual practice, and compassionate action
- It takes some time to go deeper as a group. There is value in having a group that stays together for a significant amount of time in that levels of trust, comfort, listening, and relationship deepen. After several times of gathering, invite the group to discern together whether they would like to continue or not, each person being invited to share their thoughts and hopes

For more information or questions about the House Gatherings please contact Earth & Soul at:

[info@earthandsoul.org](mailto:info@earthandsoul.org) (House Gathering in subject line)