

Gratitude for Community - Adults

This guide contains many resources. We recognize that every community's needs are different, so feel free to pick and choose what works best for you.

Key goals and ideas

Recognizing the gifts that community offers.

Noticing what is vital for generating and sustaining community, and what leads to its disintegration.

We are connected in community, and our individual choices matter to each other.

Preparation

Discern which (if not all) of the readings and quotes you want to use.

Choose queries to ask and plan for how you will use them (possibilities are explored [here](#)).

Introduction

A community is a lot like a tapestry, or something woven together out of thread or wool. A community is threaded together out of many individual people. The different colors, textures, and fibers signify the different kinds of people that might make up a community, their different gifts, experiences, and other kinds of diversity. And coming together they make something more complex and beautiful than the individual parts.

In Guatemala, one of Right Sharing of World Resource's partner countries, [tapestry weaving](#) has a long history. Ancestral stories from the past, experiences from the present, and hopes for the future can be embedded into the tapestries as a way to communicate what is important to the weavers and their communities. Once completed, tapestries may serve as clothing to protect us from the elements, telling stories of who we were and who we might become as we go about our days. Tapestries may also serve as decorative wall hangings, bringing color and beauty to our lives. What other ways have you seen tapestries used?

Readings and Quaker Quotes

“George Fox gave as his test of a meeting the call to make it a power house, what today we should call a filling station... If these meetings of ours, these vital cells, are to be power-stations, they must feel a much greater sense of responsibility than they now do for the welfare of the community in which they live... We have too easily assumed that a local Quaker Meeting lives unto itself, is responsible only for its own worship and ministry, can then shake hands and go home to a good dinner. That is not enough. It is an eternal principle of life itself that it can be saved only through self-giving. Life takes on the glow of consecration only when it ‘loses’ itself for the sake of others. These little Quaker islands of ours, which dot the length and breadth of our country, would stir with new life if they suddenly found themselves awake to the tasks of life which lie ready to hand just there where they live.”

Rufus Jones, [The Vital Cell](#)

"I have always been impressed with the thought that people are only ready to commit themselves to each other when they no longer focus on each other but rather focus together on the larger world beyond themselves. Falling in love makes us look at each other with admiration and tenderness. Committing ourselves to one another in love makes us look together toward those who need our care: the child, the stranger, the poor, the dying. That commitment lies at the heart of every community... When I reflect on community life through the ages, I can easily see how the 'ups' are closely connected to the vibrancy of caring together and the 'downs' to absorption in internal matters. Even the most contemplative, seemingly hidden community could stay alive and well only when its life remained a life reaching out beyond the boundaries of the community. Even a life dedicated to prayer and meditation needs to maintain a quality of caring together for others. The mystery of this caring together is that it not only asks for community, but also creates it."

Henri Nouwen, [Our Greatest Gift](#), pages 64-65

"Respect also means honoring people's boundaries to the point of protecting them. If you respect someone, you do not intrude. At the same time, if you respect someone, you do not withhold yourself or distance yourself from them. I have heard many people claim that they were respecting someone by leaving them alone, when in fact they were merely distancing themselves from something they did not want to deal with."

William Isaacs, [Dialogue](#), page 114

“After months of talking about ‘building the Kingdom right here,’ I looked around at the faces in the circle and thought, ‘This is impossible! What a motley crew we are!’ I was overwhelmed with the sense of what a grab-bag of people we were, how ordinary, how collectively petty... Then came the blinding realization that this was all there was – us humans. If God was willing to make do, we had better be willing to make do, too.”

Elise Boulding, [God's Ordinaries](#), page 36

Queries - Choose whichever are appropriate for you, a mix of queries that approach the range of human experience (emotional, intellectual, personal stories) often work best

What were community practices that your ancestors practiced? What about groups indigenous to where you currently live?

For the following queries, you can choose a particular community to focus on, or people can each choose individually. It may be fruitful to focus on your meeting community.

Personal Relationship with Community

Who is in this community?

How has this community supported me during challenging times?

What resources in this community have I benefited from?

What projects in this community excite me?

What's a role you see yourself playing in this community?

How do words like obligation, responsibility, and duty bear on your relationship with this community?

Relationships within Community

How would you describe this community as a tapestry? What textures or colors are in it? What's its physical state (worn and soft, frayed at the edges)?

What experiences have "frayed the edges," "caused tears," or "made holes" in this community?

What experiences have woven this community together, creating tighter bonds?

Share a time when this community was stronger together than as a sum of its parts.

This Community in Relationship to Others

How has this community been a gift to the wider community?

How can we promote a sense of belonging among newcomers in this community?

What are we doing together that is not possible alone? How do our collective gifts and skills support us in ways that we would not be able to experience alone?

Recalling Nouwen's quote, have there been times where caring for others has created community for you all?

The Future of Community

What is something I've done that has made a difference in this community?

What concrete action can I take that will strengthen this community?

Suggested practice for the next week:

Think of a specific community in your life (neighborhood, monthly meeting, school, etc.) and do something together (big or small, small may be better since this is just in one week) to benefit this community (with your time, resources, etc.)

Examples: Contribute to/volunteer with a neighborhood food pantry, reach out to an organization and ask "how can we help?"