



**Spirit in Action**

# **Facilitating Circles of Change**

**Curriculum Guide**

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Curriculum Guide

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**I N S P I R E D B Y**

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Louisville, Kentucky  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Western Massachusetts  
Boston, Massachusetts  
Cape Cod, Massachusetts

*supported by the vision and commitment of Spirit in Action*

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*Back row, left to right: Richard Ford, Cathy Hoffman, Bethsaida Ruiz, Betty Burkes, Linda Stout, Phyllis Labanowski.  
Front row: Megan Voorhees and Carolyn Cushing.*

**W**e came together from the East and West Coasts, for a year and a half. We worked collectively—sometimes in person at weekend retreats and other times by email and telephone—creating, writing, editing, reading, eating, and engaging. We were guided by spirit, our activism, our experience with Circles of Change, and all those who come before us and all those working alongside us for a beloved community and a just world.

We are parents and godparents, aunts and uncles, daughters and sons, sisters and brothers. We are married, partnered, and single; lesbian, bisexual, and straight. We were raised poor, working class, middle class, and wealthy as African American, Boriqua, Native American, WASP, and by descendents of German, Polish, Dutch, and Irish peoples. We are Quaker, Buddhist, Christian, Wiccan, and deeply spiritual.

We are creators, artists, singers, musicians, poets, writers, and visionaries. We are activists, organizers, educators, social workers, and environmentalists. Collectively, we have contributed more than 230 years of activism to the work of affordable housing, women's liberation, LGBTQ civil rights, racial equality, restorative justice, peace, youth advocacy, AIDS, health care for all, literacy, education reform, economic justice, immigrant rights, global justice, Puerto Rican Independence, and the environment—locally, nationally, and internationally. We have worked in solidarity with the peoples of Puerto Rico, Cuba, Chiapas, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Brazil, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Palestine, and Iraq.

Facilitating Circles of Change Curriculum Guide answers a call for reinvigorated leadership and connection, providing reflections and exercises for people seeking transformational social change through self-awareness and cooperation. It is our best thinking about how to support communities of people to think creatively, to clarify our priorities and our commitments, to inspire each other to live our dreams, and to feel the power of what is possible when we act collectively with others who share our commitment. It is a work in progress. Each day we are inspired anew.

This curriculum guide is the collective wisdom of nearly 200 people from diverse backgrounds who participated in Spirit in Action's Circles of Change Program between 2001 and 2004. A committee of six facilitators of Circles and two Spirit in Action staff drew from this well of wisdom to write this curriculum. Committee members brought their unique gifts and experiences to the process. As a group we were guided by a set of shared beliefs.

**We believe in heart- and spirit-centered work:** making connections to wholeness, acting with compassion, and connecting with one's life purpose, hopes, and greatest potential.

**We believe in the power of our relationships:** taking time to develop relationships based in truth and in authenticity, healing our divisions and learning to find connections with one another across differences and uncommon alliances.

**We believe in nonviolence:** inviting us to hold the "other" as part of ourselves with respect and compassion.

**We believe that in a true democracy, we are all equal even though we are not the same:** honoring different perspectives, life experiences, and the inherent goodness of each person.

**We believe that each of us has power and resources:** nurturing power with each other allows us to meaningfully effect institutional change, together.

**We believe in collective leadership:** providing opportunities for everyone to contribute their gifts and to share in leadership responsibilities and accountability.

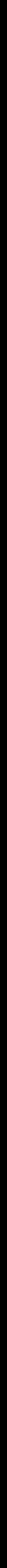
**We believe in creating a shared and positive vision:** working collectively for the change we want to see, inspiring others to join us.

**We believe that we can create a successful movement for social change:** remembering daily that who we are with each other is the foundation for the world we create.

We also recognize that we are living in a critical time. War making, militarism, violence, and injustice abound towards humanity and the earth. The government policies of the United States endorse the unprecedented use of preemptive war to attack others and use pretexts of outside threats to exercise force designed for world domination. The corporate-controlled media provides justification to the powers-that-be, ignoring the stories of hope and change. Violence is glorified as heroic and promoted as a solution to violence eclipsing the power of community, cooperation, and love. And, inattention to global warming and environmental pollution has led to a devastation of our land and waters for generations to come.

Yet, every day individuals and groups of people are living an alternative based on mutuality and respect. Every day men, women, and children express compassion, cherish family, write music, fall in love, and notice the beauty and brilliance present in themselves and others. Every day people are organizing for peace and justice, growing food, cleaning parks, marching in demonstrations, challenging toxic waste dumping, advocating for better schools and access to health care, making documentaries, and creating hope through public art. Every day we hold a vision and insist on democracy.

Spirit in Action draws its inspiration from those who have come before us and those who work alongside us—in our own communities and around the globe. Circles of Change bring us together, people seeking peace and justice, to explore and practice activism that sustains and nurtures our hearts and souls. We have created the Facilitating Circles of Change Curriculum Guide to support our work in these critical times. It is our gift to you, the facilitator, the activist, the organizer, the mother, the father, the neighbor ...



# *Spirit in Action and Circles of Change*

*“I know in my heart, if we are to make deep and  
lasting change, we have to do things differently.”*

—Linda Stout, Spirit in Action  
founder and director