

What is this work we call a Circle of Trust®?

The **Circle of Trust® approach**, described by Parker J. Palmer in *A Hidden Wholeness*, has been used for 25 years in programs offered by facilitators prepared by the [Center for Courage & Renewal](#) and the [Center for Renewal and Wholeness in Higher Education](#) to encourage each participant to connect the inner life of mind and spirit with the outer life of work and service, to re-connect soul and role, to name and claim her/his own Story. With the pandemic and increased divisiveness on our planet, some facilitators have turned to the Internet to create virtual spaces for reconnecting soul and role.

Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center is offering these Circles of Trust® that are grounded in the principle that, without denying or abandoning the outer world, we must reclaim the reality and power of our inner lives. **The Courage to Teach** was initially created to sustain and inspire public school teachers, but people in other professions soon expressed their needs for this work. Participants now include people in healthcare, ministry, business, government, higher education, philanthropy, nonprofits and others who wish to work and live more wholeheartedly. Beginning with the individual, the Circle of Trust® approach has the potential to weave together soul and role, individual and community, personal and social transformation.

Key principles of this work include:

Everyone has an inner teacher: Every person has access to an inner source of truth, named in various wisdom traditions as identity, true self, heart, spirit or soul. The inner teacher is a source of guidance and strength that helps us find our way through life's complexities and challenges. Circles of Trust give people a chance to listen to this source, learn from it and discover its imperatives for their work and their lives.

• **Inner work requires solitude and community:** In Circles of Trust we make space for the solitude that allows us to learn from within, while supporting that solitude with the resources of community. Participants take an inner journey in community where we learn how to evoke and challenge each other without being judgmental, directive or invasive.

• **Inner work must be invitational:** Circles of Trust are never “share or die” events, but times and places where people have the freedom within a purposeful process to learn and grow in their own way, on their own schedule and at their own level of need. From start to finish, this approach invites participation rather than insisting upon it because the inner teacher speaks by choice, not on command.

• **Our lives move in cycles like the seasons:** By using metaphors drawn from the seasons to frame our exploration of the inner life, we create a hospitable space that allows people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives to engage in a respectful dialogue. These metaphors represent cycles of life—such as the alternation of darkness and light, death and new

life—shared by everyone in a secular, pluralistic society regardless of philosophical, religious or spiritual differences.

- **An appreciation of paradox enriches our lives and helps us hold greater complexity:**

The journey we take in a Circle of Trust® teaches us to approach the many polarities that come with being human as “both—ands” rather than “either—ors,” holding them in ways that open us to new insights and possibilities. We listen to the inner teacher and to the voices in the circle, letting our own insights and the wisdom that can emerge in conversation check and balance each other. We trust both our intellects and the knowledge that comes through our bodies, intuitions and emotions.

- **We live with greater integrity when we see ourselves whole:** Integrity means integrating all that we are into our sense of self, embracing our shadows and limitations as well as our light and our gifts. As we deepen the congruence between our inner and outer lives we show up more fully in the key relationships and events of our lives, increasing our capacity to be authentic and courageous in life and work.

- **A “hidden wholeness” underlies our lives:** Whatever brokenness we experience in ourselves and in the world, a “hidden wholeness” can be found just beneath the surface. The capacity to stand and act with integrity in the gap between what is and what could be or should be—resisting both the corrosive cynicism that comes from seeing only what is broken and the irrelevant idealism that comes from seeing only what is not—has been key to every life-giving movement and is among the fruits of the Circle of Trust® approach.

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