



Often people ask us how to introduce a Beijing Circle. It's sort of a funny name. One of the easiest ways to think about it might be to think, "PROCESS" and "CONTENT."

The CIRCLE is the PROCESS.
BEIJING is the CONTENT.

What we've done is take the "Beijing Platform for Action," created in 1995 at a special UN gathering of women from around the whole world, and set it in the context of our faith.

We've connected scripture and prayer with the twelve issues of the Platform. Those issues reflect women's experience in our world.

The circle is an equalizer. We explain more about the circle process in the Beijing Circle Resource booklet, downloadable from http://episcopalchurch.org/41685_73656_ENG_HTM.htm?menupage=73689, or available in hard copy from Episcopal Books and Resources (http://episcopalchurch.org/41685_73656_ENG_HTM.htm?menupage=73689). We might think about a circle as a visible sign of our intention to listen prayerfully and honor each person equally.

The Beijing Circle resource is flexible.

It might be that a group would want to commit six weeks to using it as a sort of study guide. That would work.

But we also hope that Circles will commit to each other over the long term. The guide is written, not in a prescriptive way, but in a way that we hope will stir prayers and dreams, that will unite people in their desire for action, and that the actions that result will be those most pertinent to the local community.

Here's a way that you might publicize the start of a Circle:

Are you interested in issues that face women around the world? Have you wondered how you can make a difference to women at home and abroad? Have you wondered what this has to do with our faith? If so, consider joining us for the start of a Beijing Circle. Funny name? Yes indeed. But one that links our faith with the realities that women face every day. We'll have an orientation for those who are interested on _____ at _____ o'clock. Meet in the _____ and bring your prayers of gratitude for women who have made a difference in your life. We'll take about two hours. Yummies and tea available.

More about introductions to Beijing Circles. . . .

In addition to thinking about Beijing Circles as content and process, there are some other things to note –

- The resource booklet is written from a perspective that reminds us that all the issues that face women around the world also face women in our own communities. When we do our own work, it connects us in solidarity in new ways with those around the world.
- The circle reflections and process call us to action, but that action is not prescribed. That means we believe that women everywhere are resourceful and able to assess both issues and assets in their local communities. It means doing our own work, our homework, and sometimes making the invisible ones visible.
- Many congregations and dioceses are working diligently on the Millennium Development Goals. The Circle work is directly related. We suggest that anyone who is interested in working on Goal #3, “Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women,” will find this especially helpful. Even if you don’t use Beijing Circles, the Beijing Platform for Action is the set of lenses we believe will move the world forward most effectively in promoting that gender equality.
- There are lots of ways to use the booklet. Of course, working with others in your congregation is the most obvious. But think about using it with people who are heavily involved with your companion diocese, if you have them in your diocese or congregation. Or think about inviting women you know who attend churches of other denominations. Or if you know someone who works in a women’s program or ministry, ask if this might be something that would work (feel free to adapt it) with women who face some of these issues in your own community. And please, please, think about involving girls: daughter, grand-daughters, nieces, friends.
- Before you do your first Circle orientation, make sure that you read the introduction to the booklet. If at all possible, try to find the DVD’s that are mentioned, “Shall We Gather,” and the one on Beijing Circles. Every congregation received a copy of “Shall We Gather” in 2006. If you can’t find yours, maybe a neighboring congregation has it, or it might be in the diocesan office.
- When you get together for your first Circle, just use the very first unit, the general introduction. Work the process. We can talk a lot about it, but doing Now – a little bit of news from Circle work that we know about. . . .