Creating Sacred Sage-ing Space

May your heart be an altar, from which the bright flame
Of unending thanksgiving ascends to heaven.
—Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, Embrace the World

What is a Sacred Space?

Sage-ing work is sacred work. Creation of a sacred space is a ritual that Sage-ing Leaders can use in sage-ing workshops to set the tone for the sage-ing work. Since the earliest times, humans have created altars, shrines and sacred spaces as a spiritual activity. The creation of a sacred space helps workshop participants to be present in the moment with all their senses, and to focus their attention on themselves and on those with whom they share this space and time.

Some people are more comfortable referring to this space as a "table of wonder and beauty." Use whatever term feels appropriate for you and your participants.

How to Create a Sacred Space

Before the start of the workshop, the facilitators define the area to be set aside as the sacred space. The space may be a small table, covered with a lovely scarf. Objects of symbolic meaning and/or beauty such as candles, flowers, special stones, and small objects which might be used during the session, such as a bell or gong are placed on the table.

The creation of this space is one indication that during the workshop participants will move from ordinary time to extraordinary time as they gather to begin the work of sage-ing.

Prior to the workshop, those who are planning to participate may be invited to bring with them a small personal item such as a photograph, or a found object from a vacation or a meditative walk object to add to the sacred space. (These personal items will be returned to them at the conclusion of the workshop.)

Alternatively, depending upon the setting of the workshop, facilitators may send the participants outside on a quest for a special object to add to the sacred space. The possibilities are endless. The act of lighting a candle adds to the mood. A battery powered candle may also be used in settings that do not permit live flames.
How to Incorporate Creation of Sacred Space into a Sage-ing Program

The sacred space helps to set the mood for the workshop. Age-ing related posters, quotations books, and soft music can also serve as an enhancement.

Inviting participants to place special objects that they have brought or found into the sacred space, and to provide a brief explanation of the object's significance to them, can help to bring the participants into sage-ing mode by committing them to the work ahead.

The sacred space may be incorporated into the start or end of a module. For example, participants might be invited to dip their fingers into a small bowl of water placed in the sacred space. The "dipping" is a symbolic act creating purity of heart and forgiveness. Participants might be invited to take a small stone from a pile of stones in the sacred space and to write their epitaph on the stone and then place it back in the space, as if on an imaginary grave.

As a facilitator, keep in mind that you will be responsible for tidying up after your workshop, so it is recommended that sparkles, confetti, or other "messy" adornments, be excluded from the sacred space.

Sage-ing Leaders Share Their Sacred Space Ideas

**Julia Riley CSL, SCF:**

I use a chime and other objects for illustration in my Sage-ing work. In the photo, you see large, clown sunglasses, used to represent the need to develop our comic vision as a strategy for coping with the challenges of aging. An owl puppet evokes discussion about wisdom. This photo was taken at our Massachusetts Intensive, Spring 2010, where we were blessed with early lilacs. Note other flowers people collected. Pat Hoertdoerfer, co-facilitator, brought the beautiful scarf on which our objects are arranged, knowing that beauty supports healing and peace. We encourage participants to add objects they find outside that seem special. The stones were used by Pat in a ritual activity. The candle is a battery operated tea light and evokes discussion that due to safety concerns, it is not always appropriate to light a real candle in some settings.

**Anne Boynton, CSL:**
I use the creation of ritual to mark the beginning of our Sage-ing sessions. It helps us maintain presence in the moment through all of our senses and to focus our attention both inward and on the other participants.

The altars in these pictures follow a common theme: the elements of nature—water, earth, air and fire. Flowers of the season are placed in water. Earth is represented by rocks, shells, acorns, pine cones and other natural objects. Air is symbolized by feathers. As each participant brings themselves into the circle and introduces themselves, they light a candle. The flame brings the element of fire into the creation of the ritual.

In this photo, there is a brass bowl that resonates when it is struck or when a wooden stick is rubbed around the edge of the bowl. The addition of sound to our rituals, whether by this bowl, bells, chimes or soft music, engages our auditory sense, another means by which we can receive information.

In this sacred space we have a mandala of sand. Each participant brought to the altar an object that had special significance for them. Since they were notified before the workshop that they were to bring an object to add to the altar, they had time to consider what they would like to include, and were thereby engaged in our ritual even before they arrived.

We invite Sage-ing Leaders to add a paragraph and a photo from their own experience of creating sacred spaces. Send electronic files only to webcontent@sage-ingguild.org
More Sacred Spaces

"A material thing—a stone, a photograph, an old shoe—can become a shrine when it is displayed in a way that evokes inspiration, memory, respect, or reverence..."
—Jean McMann

"Becoming a Sage" Colorado Intensive
Participants brought with them a small, sacred, personal item for our circle's centerpiece shown in this picture. Some of the items include a picture, a rosary, Tibetan bowls, personal stones, a small, carved statue, a pocket altar, and even a stuffed animal. The quilted covering was made by the facilitator's mother, and the candle was used to open and close the circle each day. You will also note a small bowl on this centerpiece with index cards. As part of the introductions and opening ritual, each participant shared the meaning behind their personal item, and also wrote and shared a personal "core question" which they noted on a card and placed in a small bowl on the centerpiece. Then, midway through the weekend, participants revisited their core question and reflected on whether or not they were coming to any insights.
Midway through this workshop, we also led a short energizer immediately following a "forgiveness" exercise. Participants wrote down at least one item they wished to let go of (a feeling, a memory, etc.) that may have come up during the exercise. Then, we each wadded up our individual paper and threw them all towards the centerpiece together, symbolizing a much needed group release of energy and the true "power" of letting go!