

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
A Call To Faith In Turbulent Times: Session One: Call to Vision
Rev. Marta Valentín, for Faith Development Office, UUA
<http://www.uua.org/re/group/call-faith-turbulent-times>

Sessions in the Series are planned for 2 hours.

Session One: Call to Vision

Session Two: Call to Love

Session Three: Call to Imagination

Session Four: Call to Relationship in Action

MATERIALS

* Use the links to obtain the readings and audio-visual material (preceded by *). These items may not be republished.

- Chalice, candle, and matches or LED battery-operated candle
- Cloth and any chosen decorations for the chalice table, such as stones, shells, or flowers
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- * [Reading](#): “Let America Be America Again” by Langston Hughes
- * [Video](#): “Let America be America Again” read aloud by Bill Sinkford, Marta I. Valentín, Marlin Lavanhar, and Mimi Bornstein at the UUA 2008 General Assembly
- Computer with Internet access and large monitor or projector, speakers, and screen

PREPARATION

- Find some quiet time before beginning the session. Ground yourself in whatever spiritual discipline you practice, or simply take a few minutes to breathe and release your day, and any associated concerns.
- Set out cloth, decorations, and chalice.
- Write on newsprint and post:
 - My name is _____.
 - I am part of or claim these communities _____.
 - I am here today because _____.
- Cue video and test equipment.

OPENING (15 minutes)

Welcome participants. Share information about an introduction process called Mutual Invitation, developed by theologian Eric Law, using these or similar words:

Introductions begin with the leader, who holds power in the group. The leader introduces herself, then gives away the power by inviting someone else to introduce herself and to then invite another person to do the same. The process of self-introduction and invitation continues until everyone has been invited to speak. Today’s self-introduction will include your name, what community(ies) you claim as yours, what brought you here today.

Invite a participant to light the chalice. Read these words from the Rev. Theresa Soto, used with permission, or invite someone else to read them:

Bring your broken hallelujah here

*Bring your broken hallelujah here.
Bring the large one that is beyond
repair. Bring the small one that’s
too soft to share. Bring your broken
Hallelujah here. I know that people
have told you that before you can give*

you have to get yourself together. They overstated the value of perfection by a lot. Or they forgot. You are the gift. We all bring some broken things, songs and dreams, and long lost hopes. But here, and together, we reach within. As a community, we begin again. And from the pieces we will build something new. There is work that only you can do. We wait for you.

FOCUSED CHECK-IN (18 minutes)

Invite participants to take a deep breath together and sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Then, begin the focused check-in using the question, “How is your spirit?” Invite participants to respond as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while participants are thinking about this question. As the check-in ends, acknowledge all of the feelings in the room, whatever they may be. Offer the wish that your time together will offer hope and a glimpse of a vision which can guide us forward.

SPOTLIGHT (10 minutes)

Introduce the poem, “Let America Be America Again.” Tell participants that Langston Hughes wrote it in 1935, during the Depression. Say that the poet was a leader of the Harlem Renaissance, which lifted up cultural expressions of Black people in the U.S. who had been part of the Great Migration from the South to Northeastern and Midwestern cities. Invite the group to hear, through the poem, the dissonance between U.S. American ideals and the actual experiences of those people on the margins.

Show the video of the poem, “Let America Be America Again,” read aloud by Reverend William Sinkford, Mimi Bornstein, Reverend Marta I. Valentín and Reverend Marlin Lavanhar during worship at the UUA 2008 General Assembly.

Call attention to the poem’s text for those who may want to refer to it during the reflection time, or later, at home.

Optional: If you are not able to show the video, read the text aloud, asking a participant to help. One person reads the plain text and another reads what is in parentheses, so that two distinct voices are heard in the poem.

SILENCE (2 minutes)

REFLECTION (60 minutes)

Invite participants to reflect on the Hughes poem as well as the Soto poem you used as chalice lighting words, responding one at a time, as they are moved, without cross-talk or discussion. Use all three questions below or choose one that speaks to the group and go into more depth with it.

- Hughes’ poem offers hope, but it also offers a portrait of a country that has fallen short of its ideals. Think of the United States today, and share one thing that makes you angry, sad, or ashamed and one thing that is bringing you hope, and possibly joy.
- What constitutes a “great” America to you? What words and images from the Hughes poem speak to a vision you have for our country?

- What small broken hallelujahs might you bring forth? What pieces do you bring as gifts to help our community begin anew?

APPRECIATIONS AND LONGINGS (10 minutes)

Invite participants to take a few moments to quietly reflect on what they have appreciated about their time together and what longings they are left with, then share with one another in the group or in pairs.

CLOSING READING (5 minutes)

Share these words by Victoria Safford, used with permission. Invite participants to share in reading it aloud by each, in turn, taking a portion.

Map of the Journey in Progress

Here is where I found and chose to be brave.

Here's a place where I forgave someone, against my better judgment, and I survived that, and unexpectedly, amazingly, I became wiser.

Here's where I was once forgotten, was ready for once in my life to receive forgiveness and to be transformed. And I survived that also. I lived to tell the tale.

This is the place where I said no, more loudly than I'd thought I ever could, and everybody stared, but I so no loudly anyway, because I knew it must be said, and those staring settled down into harmless, ineffective grumbling, and over me they had no power anymore.

Here's a time, and here's another, when I laid down my fear and walked right on into it, right up to my neck into that rolling water.

Here's where cruelty taught me something. And here's where I was first astonished by gratuitous compassion and knew it for the miracle it was, the requirement it is. It was a trembling time.

And here, much later, is where I returned the blessing, clumsily. It wasn't hard, but I was unaccustomed. It cycled round, and as best I could I sent it back on out, passed the gift along. This circular motion, around and around, has no apparent end.

Here's a place, a murky puddle, where I have stumbled more than once and fallen. I don't know yet what to learn there.

On this site I was outraged and the rage sustains me still; it clarifies my seeing.

And here's where something caught was wrong with my eyes, that I see the world strangely, and here where I said, "Yes, I know, I walk in beauty."

Here is where I began to look with my own eyes and listen with my ears and sing my own song, shaky as it is.

Here is where, if by surgeon's knife, my heart was opened up – and here, and here, and here, and here. These are the landmarks of conversion.

Extinguish the chalice.

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
A Call To Faith In Turbulent Times: Session Two: Call to Love
Rev. Marta Valentín , for Faith Development Office, UUA
<http://www.uua.org/re/group/call-faith-turbulent-times>

Sessions in the Series are planned for two hours.

Session One: Call to Vision

Session Two: Call to Love

Session Three: Call to Imagination

Session Four: Call to Relationship in Action

MATERIALS

* Use the links to obtain the readings and audio-visual material (preceded by *). These items may not be republished.

- Chalice, candle, and matches or LED battery-operated candle
- Cloth and any chosen decorations for the chalice table, such as stones, shells, or flowers
- * Audio file of [“We Can Do Hard Things”](#) (14:27) by Rev. Elea J. Kemler
- * Transcript of [“We Can Do Hard Things”](#) by Rev. Elea J. Kemler
- Computer with Internet access and large monitor or projector, speakers, and screen
- Newsprint, markers, and tape

PREPARATION

- Find some quiet time before beginning the session. Ground yourself in whatever spiritual discipline you practice, or simply take a few minutes to breathe and release your day, and any associated concerns.
- Set out cloth, decorations, and chalice.
- Make copies of the [transcript](#).
- If you expect newcomers to the group, write on newsprint and post:
 - My name is _____
 - I am part of or claim these communities: _____
 - I am here today because _____
- Test equipment and cue audio file.

OPENING (10 minutes)

Welcome participants. To include those who are new to the group, offer the Mutual Invitation model, developed by theologian Eric Law, with these words or your own:

Introductions begin with the leader, who holds power in the group. The leader introduces herself, then gives away the power by inviting someone else to introduce herself and to then invite another person to do the same. The process of self-introduction and invitation continues until everyone has been invited to speak. Today's self-introduction will include your name, what community(ies) you claim as yours, what brought you here today.

Invite a participant to light the chalice. Read these words from Zen teacher, Karen Maezen Miller, used with permission, or invite someone else to read them:

First, be quiet.

Give away your ideas, your self-certainty

Your judgments and opinions

Let go of defenses and offenses

Face your critics

They will always outnumber you

*Lose all wars
All wars are lost to begin with*

*Abandon your authority and entitlements
Release your self-image
Status, power, whatever you think gives you clout
It doesn't, not really...
Give up your seat
See what you are unguarded...
A prisoner of no one and nothing
And now that you are free
See where you are. Observe what is needed.
Do good. Quietly.
If it's not done quietly, it's not good.
Start over
Always start over.*

FOCUSED CHECK-IN (15 minutes)

Invite participants to take a deep breath together and sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Then, begin the focused check-in using the question, "How is your heart?" Invite participants to respond as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while participants think about the question.

SPOTLIGHT (18 minutes)

Play the audio file of the sermon, "We Can Do Hard Things," by the Rev. Elea J. Kemler, preached January 29, 2017 at the First Parish Church of Groton, MA. Distribute copies of the transcript to those who may want to refer to it during the reflection time, or later, at home. If you are not able to play the audio, read the transcript aloud.

SILENCE (2 minutes)

REFLECTION (60 minutes)

Invite participants to reflect on the Kemler sermon as well as the Miller poem you used as chalice lighting words, responding one at a time as they are moved, without cross-talk or discussion. Use all three questions or choose one you think speaks especially to the group and go into more depth with it.

- In what ways can we help take care of each other's spirits? What care does your spirit long to receive?
- What blocks you from unleashing your love on the world?
- Can you name at least one thing that will encourage you do the hard thing of loving?

APPRECIATIONS AND LONGINGS (10 minutes)

Invite participants to take a few moments to quietly reflect on what they have appreciated about their time together and what longings they are left with, then share with one another in the group or in pairs.

CLOSING (5 minutes)

Share these words by Becky Brooks, used with permission.

Still Queer in America

*we were erased and still we loved
we were shamed and still we loved
we were expelled and still we loved
we were laughed at and still we loved
we were hunted and still we loved
we were sacrificed and still we loved
we were marketed and still we loved
we were legislated and still we loved
we were murdered and still we loved*

we were murdered

and still

we love

Ask participants to mull this question in the days ahead: “What commitments and values will you continue to hold, no matter what?”

Extinguish the chalice.

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
A Call To Faith In Turbulent Times: Session Three: Call to Imagination

Rev. Marta Valentín , for Faith Development Office, UUA

<http://www.uua.org/re/group/call-faith-turbulent-times>

Sessions in the Series are planned for two hours.

Session One: Call to Vision

Session Two: Call to Love

Session Three: Call to Imagination

Session Four: Call to Relationship in Action

MATERIALS

** Use the links to obtain the readings and audio-visual material (preceded by *). These items may not be republished.*

- Chalice, candle and matches or LED-battery operated candle
- Cloth and any chosen decorations for the chalice table, such as stones, shells, or flowers.
- * [Video of Sikh peace activist Valarie Kaur](#) speaking at a Watch Night service, December 31, 2016 (6:18)
- * Transcript of Valarie Kaur's speech, "[Breathe, then Push](#)"
- Computer with Internet access and large monitor or projector, speakers, and screen
- Newsprint, markers, and tape

PREPARATION

- Find some quiet time before beginning the session. Ground yourself in whatever spiritual discipline you practice, or simply take a few minutes to breathe and release your day, and any associated concerns.
- Set out cloth, decorations, and chalice.
- Make copies of the [transcript](#).
- If you expect newcomers to the group, write on newsprint and post :
 - My name is _____
 - I am part of, or claim, these communities: _____
 - I am here today because _____
- Test equipment and cue audio file.

OPENING (5 minutes)

Welcome participants. To include those who are new to the group, offer the Mutual Invitation model, developed by theologian Eric Law, with these words or your own:

Introductions begin with the leader, who holds power in the group. The leader introduces themselves, then gives away the power by inviting someone else to introduce themselves and to then invite another person to do the same. The process of self-introduction and invitation continues until everyone has been invited to speak. Today's self-introduction will include your name, what community(ies) you claim as yours, what brought you here today.

Invite a participant to light the chalice. Read these words from author J.K Rowling from *Very Good Lives: Fringe Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination* (Little, Brown, and Company, 2015), or invite someone else to read:

Imagination is not only the uniquely human capacity to envision that which is not, and therefore the fount of all invention and innovation; in its arguably most transformative and revelatory capacity, it is the power that enables us to empathize with humans whose experiences we have never shared.

FOCUSED CHECK-IN (23 minutes)

Invite participants to take a deep breath together, and sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Then, begin the focused check-in using the question, “How did you do with last week’s list from Rev. Kemler?” Invite participants to respond as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while thinking about this question.

SPOTLIGHT (10 minutes)

Share this short introduction to the video of Valarie Kaur (pronounced “core”):

Valarie Kaur, founder of the Groundswell Movement, is an award-winning filmmaker, civil rights lawyer, Sikh activist and interfaith leader who centers her work on storytelling for social change. These words were spoken at a Watch Night service at an AME church in Washington, DC on December 31, 2016.

Play the video. Distribute the transcript for those who may want to refer to it during the reflection time, or later, at home. If you are not able to play the video, read the transcript aloud.

SILENCE (2 minutes)

REFLECTION (60 minutes)

Invite participants to reflect on the Kaur speech. Remind them also of the words from J.K Rowling, used in chalice lighting, which named imagination as the power to empathize with humans whose experiences we have never shared. Ask them to respond one at a time as they are moved, without cross-talk or discussion. Use all three questions or choose one that speaks to the group and go into more depth with it.

- Imagine the womb of transformation Valarie Kaur describes. What does your heart and spirit want to help birth in our nation and our world?
- How do the words of the mid-wife, “Breathe, and then push,” speak to you in this moment? Do you see yourself as one that helps others breathe, or helps others push, and why?
- Who whispers to you, “You are brave”?

APPRECIATIONS AND LONGINGS (10 minutes)

Invite participants to take a few moments to quietly reflect on what they have appreciated about their time together and what longings they are left with, then share with one another in the group or in pairs.

CLOSING (5 minutes)

Share these words by the Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen, used with permission:

*Our real work is not to walk away when we don't know what to do,
Our real work is to face down the choices even when they're between harm
and worse harm...
especially when they are between harm and worse harm,
[and] when we come to the edge of our knowing,
when we do not know what to do, and ... we try anyway.
Particularly in our justice movements it's so easy to forget
that behind every triumph there are a million messy choices,
a million mysteries with no clear answer.
We're told that if we don't know what we're doing,
we're doing it wrong. But the truth may be the opposite:
only when we don't know what we're doing*

are we doing the real work.

*So we bring our bravery, we bring our love to the real work
to the mysteries that are so uncertain
[but that] in the end are the ones that grow our spirits.*

Ask participants to mull this question in the days ahead: “What has grown your spirit before, and how has that continued to make you brave?” Extinguish the chalice.

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
A Call To Faith In Turbulent Times: Session Four: Call to Relationship in Action

Rev. Marta Valentín, for Faith Development Office, UUA
<http://www.uua.org/re/group/call-faith-turbulent-times>

Sessions in the Series are planned for two hours.

Session One: Call to Vision

Session Two: Call to Love

Session Three: Call to Imagination

Session Four: Call to Relationship in Action

MATERIALS

** Use the links to obtain the readings and audio-visual material (preceded by *). These items may not be republished.*

- Chalice, candle and matches or LED-battery operated candle
- Cloth and any chosen decorations for the chalice table, such as stones, shells, or flowers
- * [Audio file](#) of “All that You Touch (excerpts)” (10:37) by Rev. Theresa I. Soto
- * [Transcript](#) of “All that You Touch (excerpts)”
- Computer with Internet access and large monitor or projector, speakers, and screen
- Newsprint, markers, and tape

PREPARATION

- Find some quiet time before beginning the session. Ground yourself in whatever spiritual discipline you practice, or simply take a few minutes to breathe and release your day and any associated concerns.
- Set out cloth, decorations, and chalice.
- Make copies of the [transcript](#).
- If you expect newcomers to the group, write on newsprint and post :
 - My name is _____
 - I am part of, or claim, these communities: _____
 - I am here today because _____
- Test equipment and cue audio file.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING (5 minutes)

Welcome participants. To include those who are new to the group, offer the Mutual Invitation model, developed by theologian Eric Law, with these words or your own:

Introductions begin with the leader, who holds power in the group. The leader introduces herself, then gives away the power by inviting someone else to introduce herself and to then invite another person to do the same. The process of self-introduction and invitation continues until everyone has been invited to speak. Today’s self-introduction will include your name, what community(ies) you claim as yours, what brought you here today.

Invite a participant to light the chalice. Read these words, excerpted from a post by Carey McDonald and used with permission, or, invite someone else to read them:

March with millions! Take an action every day! Target swing congressional districts! I’ve never seen it like this before....The energy is wonderful. It’s also overwhelming, because suddenly

millions more people have realized that oppression is not abstract. It's in their face, feeling like a matter of perhaps literal life and death.

I'd like to encourage us all to stop asking "What do I do?" because this is not simply a matter of fitting the right political tactic to the problem at hand. We are living with the abusive reality of racism, sexism, jingoism, homophobia and transphobia unmasked, no longer bothering with the charade of polite company.

So rather than ask "what do I do?" we should ask "with whom am I in relationship?" You figure out which action to take by paying attention to who's doing the asking. This is not just semantics. Everything from your Facebook feed to your charitable donations flows from who you are comfortable with, who you listen to, and who's in your social network. Who you trust. What we need is more of us to have the courage to shift who we hear/see/know/understand/trust/love, and to allow the power of that relationship to change the way we live each day.

FOCUSED CHECK-IN (21 minutes)

Invite participants to take a deep breath together and sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Then, begin the focused check-in using the question, "What relationships are changing the way you understand yourself and the world at this moment?" Invite participants to respond as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while participants are thinking about the question.

SPOTLIGHT (12 minutes)

Share this short introduction to the audio:

The Rev. Theresa Ines Soto was ordained in 2016 and serves the congregation in Flint, MI as interim minister. These pieces are excerpted from a sermon she preached on January 22, 2017.

Play the audio. Distribute the transcript for those who may want to refer to it during the reflection time, or later, at home. If you are not able to play the audio, read the transcript aloud.

SILENCE (2 minutes)

REFLECTION PROMPTS (60 minutes)

Invite participants to reflect on the Soto sermon as well as the words from McDonald you used as chalice lighting words, responding one at a time as they are moved, without cross-talk or discussion. Use all three questions or choose one that speaks to the group and go into more depth with it. If your group is interested in finding out more about resilience circles, mentioned by Rev. Soto, refer them to localcircles.org.

- How does participating in the process of change affect the way you are living your life right now? Where are you trying—with other people and other forces—to co-create change?
- Who or what is a tonic for your depleted human heart and weakened human will that can point you in the "right" direction? Are you willing to allow yourself to be redirected?
- Resilience Circles, as Rev. Soto describes them, are small groups that gather for learning, mutual aid, and social action. To what communities (of any type) do you already belong that gather with one or more of these expressed purposes? What do you bring to those communities, and what do they offer you?

APPRECIATIONS AND LONGINGS (10 minutes)

Invite participants to take a few moments to quietly reflect on what they have appreciated about their time together and what longings they are left with, then share with one another in the group or in pairs.

CLOSING (5 minutes)

Share these words adapted from ones by the Rev. Gretchen Haley, used with permission:

*Though you have been warned
and given plenty of explanations
reasons to do otherwise
you have persisted
to claim a life of joy, and justice
to carve out this time
this space for the renewal
of your own heart
despite all the reasons, the resistance
fighting for your attention, luring you towards fear
you persist
to practice gratitude
for this day, this life
that has been given
this chance to begin again
and so let us gather in our communities, our congregations, our neighborhoods, and our homes
that we might
offer one another courage, strength
healing, hope
and this promise to
persist in kindness,
persevere in compassion
and
prevail in a life that is for more than ourselves.*

Extinguish the chalice.