

**Balancing Comfort and Risk: Talking Across Divides/Covenant Group session  
for May 2013  
Community Church of Chapel Hill Unitarian Universalist**

**Chalice Lighting and Opening Words:**

Come into this place of refuge.

Come into this circle of hope, holiness, and health.

Come into this sanctuary of sharing.

Come in and feel secure and comfortable,

Come in, knowing that you will be able to explore and learn and discover.

Come in, feeling that you will be heard and will be able to hear.

(borrowed from SGM January 2009, Helen Zidowecki)

**Meditation:** A minute or two to breathe and center

**Check-in:** Share with the group: What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing.

**Topic:**

Our congregation, as part of its vision, wishes to be a “sanctuary for dialogue.” In a recent sermon Maj-Britt asked members of the congregation why they thought that was an important goal. Several said something to the effect: Because we, as UU’s, embrace diversity, so we need to grow in our capacity to actually be more inclusive. We acknowledged that there are divides we have a hard time crossing in our UU congregations. Notably political divides (conservatives often feel unwelcome); and some religious ones (Christians sometimes feel less than welcome).

The congregation was also asked to reflect on studies (Jonathan Haidt in “The Righteous Mind”) which claim that we’re all self-righteous hypocrites, on some level. Meaning, we all have aversions to some people or groups but we tend to cover up our judgments with the voice of our internalized PR agent; and we may not even be aware of them consciously.

During the sermon the congregation was asked to mentally finish this sentence, “I can’t stand people or groups who...” The idea being that we need to know the contents of our own minds and hearts if we are to grow in the capacity to be inclusive.

The congregation was also asked which “we’s” or “us’s” they enjoy being a part of. Some people answered in ways that were positive and acceptable to themselves and others (e.g. family, church etc); others answered in ways that aligned them with parts of themselves they might enjoy as privilege, but felt ambivalent about proclaiming (white, southern male). One person joyfully proclaimed her love of being a member of that part of the population which is healthy, trim, and very physically fit. To which the minister responded: I hate you (appropriate laughter followed, from both the physically fit speaker and others).

**Questions:** See if one or both of these questions evoke a response or a story in you. Or you might reflect on one of the main points or answer one of the questions contained within the Topic paragraph, and then elaborate on it.

1. What do you need to have in place in order to feel safe to explore your own limitations when it comes to truth telling? Describe a time that you felt safe even though difficult topics were being discussed. What made you feel safe?
2. Share a time when you took a risk, such as in sharing something about yourself. How did that feel? What reaction did you get?

**Guidelines for sharing:** We'll each speak for about \_\_\_\_\_minutes, with no cross talk. In other words, no interrupting, advice-giving, blaming, setting someone straight, saving, fixing. To avoid cross-talk it is wise to speak in the first person. Give yourself permission to keep the focus on yourself for this brief time. Listen deeply for what your "shy soul" may want to say, and listen deeply to others so that their "shy soul" may do the same.

**Check-Out/Likes and Wishes:** How did the session go for you?

**Closing words:**

If here you have found freedom, take it with you into the world. If you have found comfort, go and share it with others. If you have dreamed dreams, help one another, that they may come true! If you have known love, give some back to a bruised and hurting world. Go in Peace.

-Lauralyn Bellamy

**-Submitted by Rev. Maj-Britt Johnson**