



# SEEKING CIRCLE SESSION GUIDE



## Table of Contents

<b>Session</b>	<b>Page</b>
Introduction	3
1. Coming Together: Empowering Ourselves Through Our Bonds	7
2. Humans Talking Together: The Power of Words/The Words of Power  Being Together: The Power of Covenant, Commitment, and Accountability	10
3. What is Reverence for Life?	16
4. Humans Talking Together About Other Species: How Words and Thoughts Have Power	20
5. An Issue of Justice; An Issue of Faith	27
6. Extending the Circle of Compassion Through Congregations	31
7. Expanding the Congregational Vision: Developing the Action Plan	34
8. Celebration!!!	38

## Seeking Circle Sessions: Introduction

*Everyone who wants to make the world a better place faces the same challenge: opening people's hearts and minds to new ideas. ~ Matt Ball, author and animal advocate.*

**Welcome to the Seeking Circle Sessions Series**, a cornerstone of the Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry (UUAM) Reverence for Life Program. Perhaps you and others in your congregation are interested because you have formed a strong relationship with a particular nonhuman animal or species. Maybe you'd like to know how to enhance your UU faith development in affirming that all beings have inherent worth and dignity. You find it exciting to know that other species have textured lives beyond their relationships to human, and have decided that now is the time to become more engaged in nonhuman animal justice issues.

Whatever brings you here, this Seeking Circles Sessions Series offers an open, creative and supportive setting in which to examine the human relationship with beings of other species. The Seeking Circles draw upon our Unitarian Universalist principles, the thinking and vision of ethical and religious leaders, and the "gospel of our own experience" to create opportunities for uplifting spiritual growth as we deepen our understanding of the essence of our relationships with other species. They provide a context in which to address these fundamental religious questions: what does it mean to be human in a community of many species, and what is the human response to this understanding? This response entails addressing the interweaving justice issues that impact all species and peoples, including one of the most pressing ethical issues of our time: the well being of other species with whom we share our ecological and social communities.

The Seeking Circles Sessions are designed to help congregations discern their calling to animal ministry. They do this by building trust and relationships between individuals within a congregation, and by providing a framework for a deepening faith in the UU principles as they relate to all species. Animal ministry may take many forms, including, but not limited to, organizing an animal ministry team within a congregation, becoming a UUAM chapter, or entering the Reverence for Life program. In so doing individuals help each other nourish themselves so that they may heal the world. The form of this healing varies between individuals and congregations, but at its core individuals build a grounded, thoughtful multispecies ethic and garner tools to express, in words and action, these values to the larger community. As we deepen the awareness of this profound and urgent moral imperative, we join with other prophetic social justice advocates, opening up the Unitarian Universalist vision of anti-oppression, justice and compassion to include all

beings.

It is the hope of the UUAM that groups completing the Seeking Circles Sessions will become increasingly engaged and bring the Reverence for Life Program to their congregation. Information about the Reverence for Life Program may be found by clicking on the Reverence for Life link at [www.uuam.org](http://www.uuam.org). Completing these sessions is a requirement of the Reverence for Life Program, but you need not be committed to the RFL program to undertake these circles. Groups may emerge from the Seeking Circle experience with one or all of the following outcomes:

1. Development of an action plan to bring multispecies awareness or animal justice before the greater congregation.
2. Establishment of a Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry chapter in their congregation.
3. Participation in the Reverence for Life Program leading to a congregational covenant or certification.

### **About Seeking Circle Sessions**

Seeking Circles:

1. Use the Seeking Circles Series Curriculum.
2. Are based on Unitarian Universalist Principles.
3. Have a structured format adapted from the small group ministry format <http://www.smallgroupministry.net/>
4. Meet regularly. Each group decides whether this is monthly, weekly, bi-weekly, etc.
5. Start and end on time.
6. Meet for a prescribed period of time agreed upon by the group. Generally 1 ½ to 2 hours is needed per session.
7. Have a consistent facilitator(s).
8. Consistently offer a check in period where members share cares and concerns and issues they are facing. Each person in the group speaks uninterrupted. Generally, what is offered in the group, stays in the group. Group decides what guidelines and what their covenant will look like in the first Session.
9. Restrict cross talk during check in and additionally as decided by the group
10. Are flexible and adaptable to the needs and interests of the group.
11. Are open and composed of at least three and no more than 10 members so as to allow creative interchange and time for each individual to share.
12. May be coordinated by one or two interested congregants or sponsored by a specific congregational group such as the Green Sanctuary Committee,

- Religious Education Committee, Social Justice Council.
13. Most sessions have some preparation as indicated in the preceding session. Individualized group preparation may be substituted.
  14. Some sessions may go longer than anticipated. Feel free to extend the content and discussion over two meetings.
  15. Groups may wish to add additional sessions of their own design. If these prove successful, please send them to the UUAM Reverence for Life Coordinator so that they may be incorporated into this guide.
  16. Topics and directions of discussions are decided upon by the whole group, and not by the specific interests or passions of the facilitators. This allows for greater sense of inclusivity and commitment from all.

### **Food at Seeking Circles**

**To Eat or Not to Eat?** Facilitators of the Seeking Circles will face this dilemma. They will decide whether food and/or beverage will be available at the Seeking Circle Sessions. The Small Group Ministry discourages food at these transforming spiritual sessions. Food can distract from the intent of the group - both during preparation and during the session, itself. The food may move the group off topic.

On the other hand, the Small Group Ministry makes an exception to its "No Food" preference when it comes to affinity groups involving food.

If a group decides that food is appropriate, there are several things to consider:

- Finger foods, appetizers, or baked goods might be less intensive to make and eat.
- Have no food during the Seeking Circle but have light snacks after the chalice has been extinguished and the circle opened.
- In the interest of inclusivity, the group members should be encouraged to bring plant-based foods so all can eat what each has brought. The Unitarian Universalist Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice Statement of Conscience states, "we aspire to buy, raise, and consume food for ourselves and our families that: increases our proportionate consumption of plant-based foods, which increases global access to calories, provides health benefits, and prevents injuring animals."

Whatever the decision about food at Seeking Sessions, feel free to **celebrate** during the last session with a potluck offering foods that consider the inherent worth and dignity of all beings, such as plant-based food.

**The Reverence for Life Team** is available to support and assist congregations and congregational groups as they engage in the Seeking Circles. We request that all congregations using these materials inform the Reverence for Life Coordinator of their plans so that we can determine the volume these materials are used, and to guide participants in the sometimes subtle aspects of small group discussion that can lead to success or failure. We especially encourage facilitators to meet with their congregational leadership so as to gain understanding and practice in small group facilitation. The Reverence for Life Team and Coordinator can be contacted at [www.uuam.org](http://www.uuam.org) and clicking on the Reverence for Life link.

## Resources

Creating a Small Group Ministry Covenant. First Unitarian Church of San Jose.

[http://sanjoseuu.org/sgm\\_content/M-MilestoneSessions/M145-Creating%20an%20SGM%20Covenant/](http://sanjoseuu.org/sgm_content/M-MilestoneSessions/M145-Creating%20an%20SGM%20Covenant/)

Hill, Robert. (2003). *The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry: Saving the World Ten at a Time*. Boston: Skinner House

Small Group Ministry. <http://www.smallgroupministry.net/>

Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice.

<http://www.uua.org/statements/statements/185320.shtml>

### Acknowledgements

Version 1.0: The first version of this Guide was written by Vicky Talbert, who was the Chair of the Reverence for Life Task Force. Her leadership and authorship are the reason this guide exists. We give a deep bow of thanks to her gracious gift of her time and efforts.

Version 2.0: The current version has been somewhat changed from the original version, modified by the Reverence for Life Team with suggestions by several who offered feedback and edits based on their experience of using this in their congregations. Thanks to everyone!

## Session 1

### Coming Together: Empowering Ourselves Through Our Bonds

#### Chalice Lighting

Whoever you are, whatever you bring, wherever you are on your journey – you belong here because you are here, and because in this special place, in these special moments, we bid one another welcome. ~ UU Partner Church Council

#### Check In:

Check In means going around the circle and inviting each participant to share what is going on in their lives, and what joys, sorrows, or concerns are in their heart, mind, and body. A short period of silence follows each individual's sharing.

#### Readings for Reflection:

### Why We Are Here\*

Those who are successful in making the world a better place are students of human nature. They understand that each of us is born with a certain intrinsic nature, raised to follow specific beliefs, and taught to hold particular prejudices. Over time, we discover new “truths” and abandon others, altering our attitudes, principles, and values.

Even though we can recognize that our belief system changes over time, at any given point, most of us believe our current opinions are “right” – our convictions well founded, our actions justified. We each want to think we are, at heart, a good person. Even when, years later, we find ourselves reflecting on previously held beliefs with a sense of bemusement (or worse), it rarely occurs to us that we may someday feel the same way toward the attitudes we now hold.

Effective advocates understand this evolution of people’s views, and, furthermore, recognize they can’t change anyone’s mind. No matter how elegant an argument, ultimately, real and lasting change comes only when others are free to explore new perspectives. Of course, there is no magic mechanism to bring this about. The simplest way to encourage others to open their hearts and minds is for our hearts and minds to be open, believing in our own potential to learn and grow. I believe sincerity and humility are imperative for advocates, because no one has all the answers. *Matt Ball, author and animal advocate*

## Questions to Guide Reflection and Discussion

1. Why have you come today?
  2. What are you bringing to the group? What do you hope to take away?
  3. What concerns might you have about your participation in this group?
  4. With what species or individual animals do you have a special affinity or bond? Do you have a particular story or incident you can share to highlight your affection, admiration, wonder, fear, mistrust, dislike, or awe of another species?
  5. How might this group support your relationships with other species and your care for them, including the human species?
  6. What do you understand from Matt Ball's statement above? Does it help inform you about why you are here?
  7. How does what you have heard from others inform you about why you are here, and what is the purpose of the group?
- (Session 2 deals specifically with the purpose, topics, and guidelines of the group).

### Check Out:

What are we leaving with today? Celebrations? Mourning?

## Extinguishing the Chalice

Our strategy, therefore, must be to accomplish the possible while inspiring those who will come after us to achieve the impossible. We must dream the impossible dream and broadcast that dream so that every year, every decade, every generation, there are more and more of us who share it. All the while, we must never retreat from doing what we can. To abandon either the dream or the work is to abandon the animals, because it is this union of the impossible dream with the possible work that will bring success. Nothing else will.

~ Norm Phelps, Buddhist Unitarian Universalist and advocate for animal rights

**Looking ahead to next session.** Read *My Commitment as a Leader to Speak Truth with Love* from First Unitarian Church, Portland, Oregon and *Background Reading on Covenants* from the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Jose in Session 2's

**Background Reading.** If people don't read these before the beginning of Session 2 (or any session) you can have someone summarize them or allow people to read them out loud or individually during the **Readings for Reflection** period.

## Resources

A Life Connected Brochure and Video.

<http://www.nonviolenceunited.org/pdf/alifeconnected.pdf>

Ball, Matt. (2006). *A Meaningful Life: Animal Advocacy, Human Nature, and a Better World*.  
[www.humaneeducation.org/documents/view/84](http://www.humaneeducation.org/documents/view/84)

Phelps, Norm. Interview. [http://www.abolitionist-online.com/\\_06phelps.html](http://www.abolitionist-online.com/_06phelps.html)

Phelps, Norm. (2007). *The Longest Struggle: Animal Advocacy from Pythagoras to PETA*.  
Lantern Books.

Vlachos, Eleni. (2008). *Seeing Through the Fence*. Porch Life Productions. DVD  
documentary about animal rights and human responsibility

Weil, Zoe. (2009). *Most Good, Least Harm: A Simple Principle for a Better World and  
Meaningful Life*. Beyond Words/Atria

## Session 2

### Humans Talking Together: The Power of Words/The Words of Power

### Being Together: The Power of Covenant, Commitment, and Accountability

#### Chalice Lighting

*May the light we now kindle inspire us to use our powers to heal and not to harm, to help and not to hinder, to bless and not to curse, to serve you, Spirit of freedom ~ Passover Haggadah*

#### Check In

#### Readings for Reflection:

(If people don't read the background readings for this session, you can have someone summarize them or allow people to read them out loud or individually during this *Readings for Reflection* period)

We are a gentle and generous people. But let us not forget our anger. May it fuel not only our commitment to compassion but also our commitment to make fundamental changes. Our vision of the Beloved Community must stand against a vision that would allow the privilege of the few to be accepted as just and even holy. Our religious vision must again and again ask the Gospel question, "Who is my neighbor?" and strive always to include more and more of us as we intone the words that gave birth to this nation, We the people... We are, and we should be, both a gentle, and an angry people. *Rev. William Sinkford, Minister and UUA Past President*

I think that one of our most important tasks is to convince others that there is nothing to fear in difference; that difference, in fact, is one of the healthiest and most invigorating of human characteristics without which life would become meaningless. Here lies the power of the liberal way: not in making the whole world Unitarian [Universalist], but in helping ourselves and others to see some of the possibilities inherent in viewpoints other than one's own; in encouraging the free interchange of ideas; in welcoming fresh approaches to the problems of life; in urging the fullest, most vigorous use of critical self-examination. *Adlai Stevenson*

A congregational covenant responds to the question: What are the qualities that

sustain our life together as a congregation engaged in mission? A covenant is our expression of how we agree to walk together as a community of faith.

~ Rev. Margo McKenna

### **Questions to Guide Thought and Discussion**

1. What do Sinkford's and Stevenson's words have to say about how we talk with one another? How can we use these thoughts as we talk about this challenging moral issue?
2. What are other considerations for talking in the most kind and effective manner?
3. The human relationship with other species is a complex issue. People bring many perspectives to the discussion. What are some of these and how did you come to yours? How do you communicate these to others who don't have your perspective?
4. How will we will be together as we do this important work?
5. What do we need from each other? What do you need from others in the circle?
6. What will be our goals, topics, and guidelines during these session?
7. What are the promises we need to make to one another?
8. Take the time now to write down what you have discussed. List your topics and goals. Write out your covenant and keep this copy before you at each subsequent meeting.

### **Check Out:**

How did we do with our covenant? What are we leaving with today? Celebrations? Mournings?

### **Extinguishing the Chalice**

Now may the love of truth guide you, the warmth of love hold you and the spirit of peace bless you, this day and in the days to come.

We have reached the end of this time

For the gathering of memory

And for letting the imagination play with future possibilities.  
 We have enjoyed magic moments  
 And edified each other.  
 Shall it be concluded, then?  
 Or will this adventure, now commenced, continue --  
 Our separate paths converging, meeting, merging  
 In the unending quest for love more perfect,  
 The joyous struggle for meaning more sufficient  
 And life more abundant. ~ Rev. Jane E. Mauldin

**Looking ahead to next session:** Read the **Background Readings** in Session 3.

### **Background Readings**

#### **My Commitment as a Leader to Speak Truth with Love** From First Unitarian Church, Portland, Oregon

I will communicate openly.  
 I will speak honestly and not withhold myself.  
 If I have a problem with someone, I will speak to the person and not about them.  
 I will speak clearly and concretely.  
 I will seek to understand, listening with an open heart and an open mind.  
 I will withhold judgment and check out my assumptions.  
 I will be open to feedback from others.  
 I will act with heart.  
 I will share how I feel as well as what I think.  
 I will bring my heart to painful issues.  
 I will be courteous to others, but not at the expense of speaking my truth.  
 I will treat others with respect, even when we disagree.  
 I will act with integrity.  
 I will take responsibility for what I say and do.  
 I will take personal responsibility to do my part for the well being of the group.  
 I will try to discern when to stick to principle and when to let it go.  
 I will abide by agreements about disclosing information.  
 I will cultivate personal relationships.  
 I will approach others and myself with humor and joy.  
 I will seek to know others as people.  
 I will be friendly and welcoming.

I will acknowledge and appreciate others.

I will honor their contributions.

I will respect the requirements of unique roles.

I pledge to observe these practices to do my best to trust that others are observing them, and to forgive others and myself when we inevitably make mistakes. I will hold others accountable and expect others to hold me accountable.

### **What They Dreamed Be Ours to Do: Lessons from the History of the Covenant**

What shall we promise one another? The history of covenant can help us answer this question. Covenant, most simply, means "to come together" as we are doing here in this hall of Covenant. ("Convention" is from the same Latin root -- con, "together," and venire, "to come.") Covenant, more specially, means "to come together by making a promise." As when two people promise to love and care for one another.

As Unitarian Universalists, we most often speak of covenant as a verbal statement of promise between individuals who exercise their power to choose, and thus bring community into being. There are historical reasons why we think this way. It is an expression of the dominance of an individualistic understanding of human existence. Individual, first. Then, community.

The theological history of covenant has another side, and can be a resource to help us see another way. And, we need another way now. The limits of a merely individualistic understanding of human existence are pressing upon us. Our attachment to an economic system that maximizes self-interest has broken our covenant with the earth and with our neighbor. In our religious movement we are grappling with what this means, including taking a hard look the complicity of our religious tradition in this broken covenant. It is important that we do this. Multiple oppressions that our hearts cry out against -- racism, sexism, the neglect of children, and the abuse of the environment -- intersect in an economic system whose bottom line is the maximization of self interest for individuals.

*Excerpt from "What They Dreamed Be Ours to Do: Lessons from the History of the Covenant" by Rebecca Parker*

### **Background Reading On Covenants From the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Jose**

The Judaic-Christian tradition has had a long history of covenants, beginning in the time of the Old Testament, continued through the New Testament period, and influencing the early religious traditions even into the 17th Century as Europeans began to settle in North America. The basis for covenant within these two traditions was theological...a firm belief that God demanded promises, not only to him, but also between religious believers themselves. It is out of this tradition that early Unitarians, and Universalists, chose to make covenants. They believed that God wanted them to live in respect, love, compassion and commitment, toward God and toward one another.

From our two rich histories, both of Unitarians and of Universalists, we see a commitment to make and keep promises, covenants, with one another. Though we have always refused to adopt any creedal statement in either tradition, we had historically viewed our covenants as relating to God, as well as to one another. But, as Unitarians and Universalists merged in 1961, and as we have grown in our understanding of diversity and moving beyond mere tolerance, we have many members and friends who do not accept the concept of covenanting with God. Nor do we believe in theological or biblical bases for covenanting. Yet, today we need covenant more than ever.

It is the act of covenant that holds congregations together. Consider the promises associated with agreeing to live by our seven UU principles.

When we affirm the inherent worth and dignity of all beings, we are saying that we respect one another's personhood and we will not violate it. When we affirm justice, equity, and compassion in human relations, we are saying that we will treat each other with justice, equity, and compassion. When we say we accept one another and encourage one another's spiritual growth, we are promising to strive for understanding of differences. When we strike out on a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, we are demonstrating our belief in a free faith.

When we affirm the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process, we are acknowledging our diversity of belief and committing to the use of fair practices for

decision- making. When we strive for world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all, we are agreeing that all beings require peace, liberty and justice.

And when we affirm our respect for the interdependent web of existence, we are acknowledging that we are dependent upon one another, that we cannot live in isolation from one another, nor can we disregard the needs of our mother earth and father sky. In essence, we are saying to one another and to the larger world, "you are safe with us. We will respect you. We will encourage your growth. We will work to understand who you are and we will not force you to be other than you are. When we have differences of opinion, we will talk them through respectfully and we will make decisions democratically." Covenants are the foundation of safe congregations, growing and healthy congregations, lively and joyful congregations.

-Rev. Margo McKenna, First Unitarian Church of San José 2002

## Resources

*Creating a Small Group Ministry Covenant.* First Unitarian Church of San Jose.

[http://sanjoseuu.org/sgm\\_content/M-MilestoneSessions/M145-Creating%20an%20SGM%20Covenant/MSWord/](http://sanjoseuu.org/sgm_content/M-MilestoneSessions/M145-Creating%20an%20SGM%20Covenant/MSWord/)

Parker, Rebecca. (1998). *What They Dreamed Be Ours to Do: Lessons from the History of the Covenant.* General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

<http://archive.uua.org/ga/ga98/jun29parker.html>

## Session 3

### What is Reverence for Life?

#### Chalice Lighting

*Spirit of life and love, we have gathered here in search of answers to hard questions. We have come in search of understanding, in search of community. We have come in search of hope and healing.*

*Let this be a place not only of searching, but of discovery. Let this be a place not only of learning, but of wisdom. Let this be a place not only of meeting, but of connection. And let this be a place where healing fosters giving and hope fosters service.*

*This is our prayer: that we may create here a circle of love, ever expanding, ever growing, as we seek to know you, the source of our being. ~ Rev. Sue Ayer*

#### Check In

#### Readings for Reflection

Quotes by Albert Schweitzer;

*In everything you recognize yourself again. Wherever you see life-that is you! What is this recognition, this knowledge apprehended by the most learned and the most childlike alike? It is reverence for life, reverence for the impenetrable mystery that meets us in our universe, an existence different from ourselves in external appearance, yet inwardly of the same character with us, terribly similar, awesomely related. Reverence before the infinity of life means the removal of the strangeness, the restoration of shared experiences and of compassion and sympathy.*

*By having a reverence for life, we enter into a spiritual relation with the world. By practicing reverence for life we become good, deep, and alive.*

*Reverence for life..it is the whole ethic of love in its deepest and its highest sense. And it is the source of renewal again and again for the individual and for humankind.*

*We no longer belong to ourselves alone; we have become the brothers and sisters of all who suffer.*

*Each individual has to decide for himself how far he can remain ethical and how far he must submit himself to the necessity for destruction and injury to life, and therewith incur guilt*

*The friend of nature is the man who feels himself inwardly united with everything that lives in nature, who shares in the fate of all creatures, helps them when he can in their pain and need, and as far as possible avoids injuring or taking life.*

*Until we extend our circle of compassion to all living things, humanity will not find peace.*

### Quotes by Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker

*We must learn again to live with reverence. Reverence is a form of love. It is response to life that falls on its knees before the rising sun and bows down before the mountains. It puts its palms together in the presence of the night sky and the myriad galaxies and recognizes as Langston Hughes told us, "beautiful are the stars, beautiful too are the faces of my people." Reverence greets all humanity as sacred. It genuflects before the splendor of the grass and the magnificence of the trees. It respects the complexity, the beauty and the magnitude of creation and does not presume to undo its intricate miracles.*

### Questions to Guide Thought and Discussion

1. How would you define or explain reverence?
2. Where do you experience reverence in your life?
3. How does reverence nourish you in ways that affirm your interconnection to all life through beauty and a desire to live and flourish?
4. How does reverence guide you in the way you think about and care for other species? How does reverence suggest to you ways that might change your behavior?
5. What does guide you in ethical thought and behavior? Do you have different guidelines for different species?
6. What guides your congregation in ethical thought and behavior, and compassion? Are there different guidelines for different species?
7. Do you notice within yourself, or in the group as a whole, any discomfort or shift in energy when talking about how different species are treated? (Session

### Check Out:

How did we do with our covenant? What are we leaving with today? Celebrations?

Mournings?

### **Extinguishing the Chalice**

And, let us covenant with one another  
to seek for an ever deeper awareness  
of that which springs up inwardly in us. ~ Rev. Rebecca Parker

**Looking ahead to next session:** Review **Background Reading** in Session 4.

### **Background Readings**

Read about Albert Schweitzer at end of this website:  
<http://www.uuam.org/docs/honoree-bios.pdf>.

Here is one excerpt:

...Like so many thinkers of the modern world, Schweitzer wondered where the bridge could be found between science and the humanities, between facts and values, between physical laws and moral laws, between the head and heart. The answer came just two years after he'd arrived in Africa, on a hot summer's day as he journeyed upstream along the river from Cape Lopez to N'gomo to treat the wife of another missionary who'd fallen ill.

Lost in thought aboard the slow moving barge, Schweitzer in his autobiography says he was searching for the universal conception which could finally join reason with religion. He was baffled, covering pages of his notebooks with disconnected musings.

"Late on the third day, at the very moment when, at sunset, we were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought, the phrase Reverence for Life, *Erhfurcht vor dem Leben*."

The German phrase that became his touchstone means —reverence for life, but more than that, too. *Erhfurcht* has connotations of amazement, awe, and soul-stirring power. So that to behold the world and its creatures with real reverence is to be transformed by the vision—transformed from indifference to compassion, to become a coparticipant in both the travail and holiness of the earth. Rev. Gary Kowalski

### **Further Resources**

Barsam, Ara Paul (2008). *Reverence for Life - Albert Schweitzer's Great Contribution to Ethical*

*Thought.*

Cottrell Free, Ann. (1988). *Animals, Nature, and Albert Schweitzer*.

Meyer, Marvin & Bergel, Kurt (eds). (2002). *Reverence for Life - The Ethics of Albert Schweitzer for the Twenty-first Century*.

## Session 4

### Humans Talking Together About Other Species: How Words and Thoughts Have Power

#### Chalice Lighting

*As we gather together, may we learn to recognize and affirm*

*The pieces of possibility -- The bits of good -- we bring.*

*May we encourage rather than control;*

*Love rather than possess; Enable rather than envy.*

*Allowing our individual gifts to weave a patchwork of peace:*

*The soft deep blue of sensitivity and understanding;*

*The red energy of creativity;*

*The white heat of convictions;*

*The risky, fragile green of new growth;*

*The golden flashes of gratitude;*

*The warm rose of love.*

*Each of us is indispensable*

*If we are to minister to a broken and wounded world.*

*Together, in our gathered diversity, we form the whole.*

*So be it. ~ Rev. Bets Wienecke*

#### Check In

#### Reading for Reflection

If reason and morality are what set humans apart from animals, then reason and morality must always guide us in how we treat them. ~ *Matthew Scully, American Journalist, speechwriter and author of Dominion: the Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy.*

Compassion is ethical intelligence; it is the capacity to make connections and the consequent urge to act to relieve the suffering of others. ~ *Will Tuttle, educator, author and founder of the Circle of Compassion*

Words are political. They can foster oppression or liberation, prejudice or respect. Just as sexist language denigrates or discounts females, speciesist language denigrates or discounts nonhuman animals; it legitimizes their abuse. ~*Joan Dunayer, author, teacher and animal advocate*

\*\*\*\*\*

Can we open our hearts to the animals? Can we greet them as our soul mates, beings like ourselves who possess dignity and depth? To do so, we must learn to revere and respect the creatures who, like us, are a part of God's beloved creation, and to cherish the amazing planet that sustains our mutual existence. We must join in a biospirituality that will acknowledge and celebrate the sacred in all life.

No longer can we discount the lives of sensitive and intelligent creatures merely because they assume nonhuman form. The things that make life most precious and blessed - courage and daring, conscience and compassion, imagination and originality, fantasy and play - do not belong to our kind alone.

Animals, like us, are living souls. They are not things. They are not objects. Neither are the human. Yet they mourn. They love. They dance. They suffer. They know the peaks and chasms of being. ~*Rev. Gary Kowalski*

### **Questions to Guide Thought and Discussion**

1. Describe relationships you have had with animals of other species including those who share your home and those outside your immediate world, in the wild, or in crisis.
2. Why does a special bond exist between you and other animals? In what ways have animals blessed your life? Challenged your life?
3. How might your transspecies relationship with other species be different from the relationships between two other nonhuman species? Is it fundamentally different or only a matter of scale?
4. How are humans different from other species or the same? What thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and ecology do we have in common with others, or do not? Is any "difference" fundamentally unique to humans-to-other-species comparison, or is it only a matter of scale?
5. Do you treat or think of various species differently? Would you consider yourself speciesist? Can humans ever not be speciesist? (review **Background Reading**)

6. How does human language depict other species fundamentally different, separate, or inferior to humans? (review Background Reading - *How Words Matter*). Is there danger or risk in language used such as this?

7. What can you do to address issues of language that separates humans from each other, or from other species?

**Check Out:**

How did we do with our covenant? What are we leaving with today? Celebrations? Mournings?

**Extinguishing the Chalice**

*Go in peace.*

*Speak the truth.*

*Give thanks each day.*

*Respect the earth and her creatures, for they are alive like you.*

*Care for your body; it is a wondrous gift.*

*Live simply.*

*Be of service.*

*Be guided by your faith and not your fear.*

*Go lightly on your path.*

*Walk in a sacred manner. ~ Rev. Gary Kowalski*

**Looking ahead to the next session:** Review **Background Reading** and **Readings for Reflection** in Session 5.

**Background Reading****Avoiding Speciesist Language\***

**Excerpted from and reprinted, with permission, from Joan Dunayer, *Animal Equality: Language and Liberation***

Use	Avoid
<b>Animals to include all creatures (human and nonhuman) with a nervous system</b>	<b>Hierarchical references to animals (lower animals, inferior, subhuman)</b>
	<b>Dismissive terms just, mere, only, and even before animal terms (a mere beetle; They're just animals)</b>
<b>Political terms with legal implications (animal rights; justice)</b>	
<b>Equally strong words for human and nonhuman suffering or death (extreme, tragic, terrible)</b>	
<b>She (female), he (male), they (unspecified individual of unknown gender)</b>	<b>It</b>
<b>Instinct</b>	<b>Animal instinct</b>
<b>Nonhuman animals, other animals, nonhumans</b>	<b>Animals (excluding humans), dumb animals, lower animals, subhuman animals</b>
<b>Slaughterhouse</b>	<b>Meat plant, processing plant</b>
<b>Who</b>	<b>That, which, what (in reference to an animal)</b>

**Speciesism:** A failure, in attitude or practice, to accord any nonhuman being equal consideration and respect. (Joan Dunayer)

Categorizing individuals according to general species characteristics

Categorizing nonhuman species in a way that diminished their species characteristics

\*\*\*\*\*

### How Words Matter

We have words/phrases that stop and expand conversations

You've got to be kidding!  
How can you eat that!  
I think it's cruel to have pet birds.  
Are you one of those animal activists?

Could you say more about that?  
I'd be interested in hearing your take on it.

Other?

We have words that say who belongs in the "in group" and who is "out"

Vegan  
Animal rights activist  
Animal rescuer  
Dog lover  
Carnivore  
Unitarian Universalist

Other?

We have words that dehumanize, animalize, depersonalize, stereotype, or dismiss individuality, complexity of behavior, or ability to suffer

He's such a pig!  
What an animal!  
She's a Mamma Grizzly!  
Sly as a snake  
Mad as a hornet  
Bird brain  
Beast, brute  
bacon, ham, steak, pork,  
Broiler, layer, livestock, food animal

Other?

We have words that are dualistic

Animal, human (humans are animals, primates, and great apes)  
 Sentient, nonsentient  
 Lower animals versus higher animals  
 Instinctual, intelligent  
 Captive, free ranging  
 Natural, unnatural

Other?

We have phrases that are violent

Kill two birds with one stone  
 Have other fish to fry  
 More than one way to skin a cat  
 No use beating a dead horse

Other?

Words/phrases that categorize humans and nonhumans (keep us from being totally present to the uniqueness of the individual or species)

Wild  
 Domestic  
 Feral  
 Farm animal  
 Companion  
 Predator  
 Prey  
 Pet

Other?

We have words that gender and degender others

Using "it" to refer to a species that has genders  
 Using "him" or "he" to refer to those of the female gender  
 Mankind

Other?

**Using Words That Go Beyond Ideology and Separation**

We can expand conversations by linking to the feelings and universal needs of others. Universal needs or desires are those that all humans have in common. They are different from strategies

which help us reach our needs. For example, a need might be companionship, and the strategy is to invite a nonhuman animal into your life or home. Humans do not absolutely "need" dogs to survive, but we do need companionship, biodiversity, connection, beauty, entertainment, and love that a dog's presence can offer. If we can relate to others at the levels of needs, we may overcome our differences in strategies so that we can stay engaged in dialog or relationships so we can have the best chance of meeting the most needs of the most individuals. Relating to others through feelings and needs is called empathy, and empathy goes a long way to improve relationships, organizations, and effectiveness.

## Resources

Dunayer, Joan. (2001). *Animal Equality: Language and Liberation*. Derwood, Maryland: Ryce Publishing

Kowalski, Gary. (1991). *The Souls of Animals*. Walpole, N.H.: Stillpoint

Scully, Matthew. (2002). *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy*. New York: St. Martin's Press

Joyner, LoraKim. (2012). *How Words Matter*. UUAM Multispecies Encounter Handout.

## Session 5

### An Issue of Faith: An Issue of Justice

At the heart of the impulse we call religious is the desire to lessen suffering and to extend justice and compassion. ~ *Rev. Lee Devoe*

By ethical conduct toward all creatures, we enter into a spiritual relationship with the universe.  
~ *Albert Schweitzer*

A principle is a principle, and in no case can it be watered down because of our incapacity to live it in practice. We have to strive to achieve it, and the striving should be conscious, deliberate and hard.  
~ *M. Gandhi*

Kindness and compassion towards all living beings is a mark of a civilized society. Racism, economic deprivation, dog fighting and cock fighting, bullfighting and rodeos are all cut from the same defective fabric: violence. Only when we have become nonviolent towards all life will we have learned to live well ourselves. ~ *Cesar Chavez*

The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men.  
~ *Alice Walker*

### Chalice Lighting

*All too often, we pace the geometries of our walled gardens,  
Believing we are traversing the whole of creation.  
With spirits of discovery, let us uncover the mysteries nested in our routines,  
With the eagerness of children, let us seek out the secrets unfolding in our peripheral vision.  
Let us behold each fellow creature with reverence;  
Let us greet each day with praise and thanksgiving.  
For life is a gift of incomprehensible magnitude;  
Our lives are voyages with unknowable destinations.  
Along the way, let us meet, kiss, challenge, and support one another,  
Let us fashion a network of mutuality and extend it into the larger world.*

*In these ways, we forge lives of goodness and beauty;  
In these ways, we know the life of prayer. ~ Rev. John Gibb Millspaugh*

## **Check In**

## **Readings for Reflection**

Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person;  
Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;  
Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;  
A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;  
The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;  
The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;  
Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

*Unitarian Universalism draws from many sources:*

Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;  
Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;  
Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;  
Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;  
Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.  
Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

*These principles and sources of faith are the backbone of our religious community.*

## Questions to Guide Thought and Discussion

1. How do these principles and sources inform your faith, spirituality, behavior, and participation in family, congregational or organizational life?
2. One of the sources is the "words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil..." In the **Background Reading** are biographies of some of these women and men involved in animal ministry and justice. How do their words and deeds support you? Challenge you?
2. How are the issues of justice for other species and your faith connected?
3. Would you seek to change the wording of any of the principles or purposes to reflect transspecies relationships and justice? (one example is to change the First Principle to the "inherent worth and dignity of all beings" from the "inherent worth and dignity of every person")
4. What does it mean to you to foster a spirituality of compassion and promote interspecies justice?
5. Do you have practices for spiritual health. If so, what are these practices? (review Background Reading Jean Latimer's words)
6. Some people question time spent advocating to reduce suffering of nonhuman animals when there is so much human suffering in the world. How do you respond to this concern?
7. What nonhuman animal justice issue calls to you the most?
8. How have you helped or cared for other species in the past? Currently? What would you like to do in the future?
9. What kind of support do you need to continue caring for others, including yourself?

## Check Out:

How did we do with our covenant? What are we leaving with today? Celebrations? Mournings?

**Extinguishing the Chalice**

*And now may we go forth in*

*the certainty of faith, in*

*the knowledge of love,*

*and in the vision of hope.*

*And in our going, may we be blessed*

*with all good things on this day*

*and forevermore. Amen. ~ Rev. Harold E. Babcock*

**Looking ahead to the next session:** Review the **Background Reading** in Session 6.

**Background Reading**

*There is a moment in time when the soul chooses love over fear.*

*It may take eons to reach that point, but when it comes, it sweeps away all distrust, all suffering and judgment. We can prepare for it by practicing some simple techniques:*

*We practice feeling everything, so that when love comes, we feel it fully.*

*We practice mindfulness, so that when love comes, it is sustained by the discipline of choice not to indulge the small mind's need to negate and judge*

*We practice embracing that which we hate - our diseases, addiction, and troubles, so that love is felt wholly.*

*Then the moment of love comes and sweeps us away. - Jean Latimer*

**Famous Unitarian Universalists involved in Animal Ministry**

*<http://www.uuam.org/docs/honoree-bios.pdf>*

## Session 6

### Extending the Circle of Compassion Through Congregations

To heal the wounds of our planet and its peoples, to restore right relations among all God's creatures, to apportion the earth's abundance with equity and generosity—these challenges will demand all our courage, creativity, devotion, and sacrifice. ~ Rev. Fred Small

Until he extends the circle of compassion to all living things, man will not himself find peace.

~ *Albert Schweitzer*

We are a justice seeking people - excerpt from *We Are a Gentle Angry People*  
~ singer-songwriter Holly Near

### Chalice Lighting

*"We kindle this flame of hope and commitment, reminding ourselves that our circles of compassion can be limitless and extend ever outward to enfold all beings with love and dignity, kindness and hope. ~ Vicky Talbert*

### Check In

### Readings for Reflection:

*Reverence for life has to be learned. It is not just a feeling – it is a way of life that is manifested in more than an isolated moment of appreciation for nature or awe before its destructive as well as creative power. Reverence involves full-fledged devotion enacted in deeds of care and responsibility. It involves knowledge, study and attention. We need to love the world through reverence that fosters observant attention to the intricate, relationality of life. Reverence is a form of love that needs to be learned and affirmed. And this is what congregations are for: to teach us to give reverent attention to life. The task given to us here and now is to do what we can to advance reverence for life and deepen the promise of love. - Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker*

### Questions to Guide Thought and Discussion

1. Do you ever feel alone, lost, or overwhelmed in your relationships to other life and how you care for others and yourself?

2. How do you seek support and care for yourself, and other humans who care for other species?
3. How has your family, congregation, or other organization supported you in this regard? How have they challenged you?
4. What is your dream of congregational life in regards to other species? (review photograph - *My Dream of Congregational Life*)
5. What do you think is a congregation's role in promoting justice for all species and promoting and affirming faith development and spirituality in regards to transspecies relationships?
6. How can congregations, by growing in trust, understanding, and faith be a powerful force in the world to reduce institutional speciesism? How can your congregation do so? (Session 7 will go into more detail on this)

### **Check Out:**

How did we do with our covenant? What are we leaving with today? Celebrations? Mournings?

### **Extinguishing the Chalice**

*Is this ending to be an ending,  
Or merely prelude to new, more glorious beginnings?  
I pose the question;  
In your hearts lies the answer. ~ Rev. Michael A. Schuler*

**Looking ahead to the next session:** Bring ideas for an action plan to the next session and review the *Assessment of Our Congregational Assets* in **Background Reading**. Also review the websites in **Resources**.

### **Background Reading**

#### Institutional Speciesism:

Any kind of system of inequality based on species

Occurs in institutions such as government bodies, private business, corporations, universities, congregations

The collective failure of an organization to provide care, value, and inherent worth and dignity to beings because of their species

**My Dream of Congregational Life - Rev. LoraKim Joyner, DVM** (painting by Cindy Capeheart of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Gainesville, Florida).



## Session 7

### Expanding the Congregational Vision: Developing the Action Plan

We need another and wiser and perhaps a more mystical concept of animals. Remote from universal nature and living by complicated artifice, man in civilization surveys the creatures through the glass of his knowledge and sees thereby a feather magnified and the whole image in distortion.

We patronize them for their incompleteness, for their tragic fate of having taken form so far below ourselves. And therein we err, and greatly err, for the animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear.

They are not brethren, they are not underlings, they are nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and times, fellow prisoners of the splendor and travail of the earth.

~ Henry Beston, American writer and naturalist.

### Chalice Lighting

*"True benevolence or compassion, extends itself through the whole of existence and sympathizes with the distress of every creature capable of sensation."~ Joseph Addison*

### Check In

### Reading

#### Who We Are (UUAM)

UUAM is a group of concerned Unitarian Universalists and UU friends who desire to grow and express their faith as compassion towards all beings. We do this by asking these fundamental religious questions: What does it mean to be human in mixed species communities? What is our response to this understanding?

To answer these questions we draw on our UU principles and sources, traditions, and congregational life to deepen our awareness of the interdependence of life. We then support one another in not just learning how caring for all beings is a moral and religious issue, but also engaging in concrete actions that bring about change on the individual, family, congregational, community, and societal level.

We do this not just for nonhumans, but for ourselves and all of life. For as we live a life of awareness based on our interdependence (UU 7th Principle) and the inherent worth and dignity of all beings (UU 1st Principle) we live fully, deeply, and authentically. As we come to love our neighbors as ourselves, we liberate not just others, but ourselves as well.

### **The Reverence for Life Program**

The *Reverence for Life Program* assists Unitarian Universalists interested in understanding human relationships with other species, and what might be the response of both individuals and congregations to this understanding. Grounded in Unitarian Universalist principles and our rich religious and philosophical traditions, most importantly Albert Schweitzer's Reverence for Life Ethic, the program aims to deepen awareness that all life is interconnected and interdependent (UU 7th Principle) and all beings have inherent worth and dignity (UU 1st Principle). This awareness gives humans a chance for nourishment, healing, and a sense of belonging to the web of life, so that they may in turn nourish and heal the world. This nourishing and healing leads us to examine moral questions as we begin to shape a vision of liberation that includes all creation.

For this aim, the *Reverence for Life Program* supports congregations in the process of beginning, growing, and revitalizing their animal ministries. Congregations in this program may elect to become a UUAM chapter. Alternatively, members within an entire congregation can covenant with each other to be on a path of learning about the inherent worth and dignity of every being and becoming advocates for all life. Congregations may also seek Certification as a Reverence for Life Congregation.

### **Questions to Guide Thought and Discussion**

1. Given the past discussions that you've had as a group, do you feel that your congregation has a calling for the animal ministry? (to start one, rebuild one, or grow what you have already larger)?
2. Generally, what would this animal ministry look like? Would it be activities? Starting a UUAM Chapter? Entering the Reverence for Life Program? Other?
2. Reviewing Assessing Your Congregation's Assets, do you think that your congregation could support this project at this time? What assets are there? Challenges and possible stumbling blocks?
3. What resources or assets do you have or would you be willing to offer to an initiative? (such as time, finances, passion, an understanding of animal behavior, organizational skills, etc).
4. If your group is interested in extending these sessions or an action plan to include more people, with whom should you speak to see how you should proceed?(minister, President, Social Justice Chair, Program Council Chair, etc). What questions would

you ask them? What information might you offer? (Options include talking to other people in the congregation and see what they would like to do, and how they can support you, what advice they have, and how you can support the congregation's larger ministries with your efforts)

5. Who might you invite to an exploratory meeting for this initiative? How would you invite them? (what communication modality, etc).
6. Given the discussion of these questions, sketch a rough draft of next steps.
7. How will you support each other in carrying out these next steps? What do you need from each other?
8. Plan how you will celebrate during the final session. What kind of food and activities will you have? (Options include sharing recipes for plant based and fair trade food, having a picnic and going for a nature walk, going to a movie and a dinner out).

### **Check Out**

1. In general, how did this group do addressing its goals, guidelines, topics, and covenant? Provide specific examples if possible.
2. What were the highlights of your time together? What learnings or "aha" moments stand out for you?
3. What concerns or mournings do you have concerning the group? Provide specific examples if possible.
4. What are you leaving with today?

### **Extinguishing the chalice**

*While our Unitarian Universalist principles affirm the "inherent worth and dignity of every human being" and call us to seek "justice, equity compassion in human relationships," we extend those principles to include other species who also possess an intrinsic value whose well-being is vital to the whole and whose rights should parallel our own.*

~ Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry

**Looking Ahead to the Next Session:** Think about what you can offer to help celebrate your time with one another.

### **Background Reading**

## **Assessment of Our Congregational Assets**

1. What experiences has your congregation had with social justice initiatives like the Green Sanctuary, Ethical Eating, and Welcoming Congregation programs?

*<http://www.uua.org/leaders/environment/greensanctuary/index.shtml>*

*<http://www.uua.org/leaders/idbm/bgl/welcomingcongregation/index.shtml>*

*<http://www.uua.org/environment/eating/index.shtml>*

2. What level of support do you see for the Reverence for Life Program? Who are key members of your congregation with whom to discuss the program? Who might you invite to join your Reverence for Life group?

3. What groups (e.g. Green Sanctuary, Ethical Eating, Religious Education, or Social Justice Group) or individuals might be allies?

4. Does your congregation hold an annual Blessing of the Animal service?

5. Have members of your congregation participated in Healthy Congregation Training or Compassionate Communication (Nonviolent Communication) training as outlined in the Creating Peace Statement of Conscience?

*<http://www.uua.org/statements/statements/13394.shtml>*

*<http://www.uupeacemakers.org/>*

*<http://www.cnvc.org/>*

6. What characteristics might present a challenge? How might you address these most effectively?

7. What assets of your congregation would be most useful to your group as you implement this program?

### **Resources**

UUAM - Who we Are. *<http://www.uuam.org/howeare.php>*

Reverence for Life Program. *<http://www.uuam.org/reverence.php>*

Reverence for Life Manual. *<http://www.uuam.org/docs/reverence-for-life-program.pdf>*

Forming a UUAM Chapter. *<http://www.uuam.org/formchapter>*

## Session 8

### Celebration!

I believe that meaningful accomplishment comes from living life beyond ourselves, viewing our existence beyond the immediate. Doing my thoughtful best to make the world a better place is as meaningful a life as I can imagine. ~*Matt Ball, author and animal advocate*

Our most urgent question as individuals and in communities is thus, how can we hold brokenness, injustice, and suffering, with wide open eyes and open arms, and at the same time greet the day with gladness, with gratitude and hope, with forgiveness, with love of life and of one another? We can begin with the sacrament of the living word and the sacrament of celebration. The sacrament of celebration involves memory as much as it involves forward-looking hope. It is not the mourning alone, but the singing that will move our people out of the sanctuary and into the street, into the statehouse, where the life of prayer is embodied, compassion becomes commitment, and love lives and breathes as justice. *From The Sacraments of the Word and Celebration* ~by *Victoria Safford in A People So Bold.*

### Chalice Lighting

*Love is the teaching of this church.*

*The quest of truth is its sacrament*

*And service is its prayer.*

*To dwell together in peace, To seek knowledge in freedom,*

*To help one another, To do justice and love mercy,*

*To the end that all souls shall grow in harmony -*

*This is our covenant with each and with all.*

*We kindle this light in celebration of the life that we share.*

- Adapted from the chalice lighting of the  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Fort Meyers,  
Florida

### Enjoy your celebration!

#### Extinguishing the Chalice

Let us move forth on our journey, cheered by our community, blessed by our covenant, uplifted in mind, and renewed in spirit, go forth with courage and in peace to meet the days to come. ~ Rev. Burton D. Carley

## **Resources**

Millspaugh, John Gibb, ed. (2010). *A People So Bold: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists*. Boston: Skinner House.