

Chalice Circles Provide a Connection for Members and Guests

By Sally Hattig, First Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Chalice Circles at the First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor, Michigan (UUAA) continue to grow, change, and develop. It is an integral part of our Small Group Ministry. Our Congregation currently has 578 members (ranked 37 in membership) and includes 453 households. Chalice Circles help the larger congregation become smaller and enable participants to connect with a group of people, while developing a deeper spiritual meaning to their lives. It is a place for people looking for fellowship and spiritual growth. By joining a circle, group members find and build community; experience mutual commitment to shared goals; encounter something sacred in themselves and others; enhance listening skills; and learn about themselves by seeing their life in the context of others' experiences.

The program started with a study group in 2006-2007, and began the first full year of sessions in Fall, 2007. The primary goal of Chalice Circles is to engage the hearts and minds of the participants. We strive to provide a safe community for individuals to explore their beliefs and attitudes and share their personal experiences without risk of judgment. Chalice Circles meet two hours twice each month from October through May, for a total of fourteen sessions. Each group has two specially trained cofacilitators who ably lead the meetings.

This year, participation in the program has increased from 7 to 11 total circles (+57%), from 14 to 22 trained facilitators (+57%), and participants from 54 to 90 (+66%). We also offer One-Time Chalice Circles for those who otherwise cannot attend a full schedule of sessions. The sessions use the same meeting format with two co-facilitators and topics used previously in the Chalice Circle program. The interest and participation in these sessions has rapidly increased and we plan to continue providing them throughout the year.

As the program continues to develop and membership increases, several changes have been implemented. In an effort to involve more lay leaders in the program, a Leadership Council and Steering Committee were implemented. The Leadership Council consists of the supporting minister, and two lay leaders. They meet monthly to coordinate the overall program. The Steering Committee includes the supporting minister, two Leadership Council co-chairs, and several facilitators and group participants. It helps with the coordination and administration of the program. Next year, committee members will assume specific administrative responsibilities related to marketing, registration, service projects, publicity, facilitator training, assessment, and curriculum development.

A Curriculum Writing Team has been in place since the program started. It includes facilitators and group participants who work together to provide the topic session content for the next year. The feedback received from current participants and facilitators is used to review and revise the core topics, identify new topics and finalize the schedule.

Chalice Circles connect to the congregation by completing a mandatory service project. They promote stewardship of the grounds, develop a deeper sense of generosity and enhance the communal spirit of the Chalice Circle experience. Some of the projects completed this past year were helping with the Senior Luncheon, spring clean up of the Memorial Garden, and helping with the annual Silent Auction.

We are very excited about the opportunities Chalice Circles provide for our congregants and guests. As one participant stated, "I feel spiritually nourished by listening deeply to the insights of others, and by considering my own experiences and truths. I feel invigorated by the diversity of perspectives

expressed.”

Sally Hattig is currently a member of the Leadership Council and has served as a Facilitator and member of the Steering Committee

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