

When Good Facilitators Become Artists

By Margaret Edwards, Chalice Circle Coordinator

Piedmont Unitarian Universalist Church, Charlotte, North Carolina

Small Group Ministry Journal, Summer 2012

Piedmont Unitarian Universalist Church is just completing its first church year of Chalice Circles, with seven groups, eight trained facilitators, and some 44 church members as group participants. It's been a learning experience for everyone!

Initially, we were all beginners, and it took some time to bring us all on the same page as we developed group covenants and became comfortable with the basic concepts of covenant group behavior. Each month the facilitators met together, usually with Rev. Robin Tanner, who provided us with monthly session plans. In these meetings, we shared our mutual concerns and ways to handle problems. But not everyone necessarily felt comfortable following the same path. Each group – together with its facilitator – was developing its own personality. And the facilitators in turn were responding with their own uniquely creative ways to make the chalice circle experience more meaningful.

So what is the coordinator to do when the chalice circles start to deviate from one another? For us, the answer was to confirm that as long as the basic elements of the groups' covenants were met, especially the use of silence, deep listening, and speaking from the heart, each facilitator was free to modify their meeting sessions however they found most meaningful. A truly UU approach!

To give just a few examples: Several facilitators added centering rituals, such as a guided meditation. Some decorated the chalice table with a tablecloth, more candles, or other meaningful objects to help convey reverence for the process. One of our caring facilitators, a skilled teacher, concentrated on being sensitive to the learning needs of her group members, tweaking the readings and questions, or adding new material to enhance understanding of the the session topic. Yet another facilitator, with a talkative group,

chose to move the check-in time to the end of the session, rather than make an issue of over-long check-ins cutting into the main meat of the session.

Our dedicated facilitators have earned our respect this year. It has been refreshing to see them guide their Chalice Circle sessions in a way that is authentically their own. And in the process, it has helped all of us to become better leaders.

-Taken from the Small Group Ministry Network Quarterly, Summer 2012