

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Circle Ministry 2009-2010

A Life Souvenir

Adapted from the idea of Rev. Calvin Dame, Augusta, Maine
Rev. Jan Carlsson-Bull for Circle Ministry at First Parish UU Cohasset, MA

Note: See the Circle Ministry Session Sequence for process guidelines.

Gathering, Welcoming (2 minutes)

Chalice lighting & Opening words (1 minute)

We are so woven with and around each other. Steven F. Smith understands how. You might want to close your eyes as you hear these excerpts from his poem, "A Little Piece of Our Souls."

Everywhere we go we take our souls with us.
And every time we meet someone we wrap a little
piece of our souls around them
and pass it through them.
All our lives, we weave our souls
around and through everyone we meet,
tying a complex, tangled web to the earth.
This is who we are to the world around us.
Each of us has a thousand, a million tendrils of
other souls wrapped
around us and through us.
And this is who we are to ourselves.

...If I gather all these threads in my hands and hold
tight,
and if you hold onto all the threads that have ever
pierced your soul, wrapping them around you like
a protective cloak, anchoring you to the ground,
Maybe the threads won't snap, and you can keep
weaving a little longer....

Check-in/Sharing (3-4 minutes@ - 30-40 minutes)

Topical Discussion (60 minutes)

[See Circle Ministry Session Sequence as a reminder of the structure of this segment.]

First response

Cross-conversation

Topic: A Life Souvenir

At the end of our last session, we were each asked to bring to this gathering an object that holds deep meaning for us as we've moved through our life and our spiritual journey, something that qualifies as "a life souvenir." We tend not to think of our souls or ourselves as "pieces" or "threads," but I wonder if Stephen Smith's words perhaps ring true when he describes us, each of us, as having "a thousand, a million tendrils of other souls wrapped around us and through us. And this is who we are to ourselves" and later notes that if we "hold onto all the threads that have ever pierced your soul, wrapping them around you like a protective cloak, anchoring you to the ground, Maybe the threads won't snap, and you can keep weaving a little longer."

The threads of others wrapped around us and our life threads wrapped around the souls of others are sometimes distilled in the concrete reality of "a life souvenir," an item that holds profound meaning for us as we move along our life path. If an item qualifies as a life souvenir, chances are it has meaning beyond us, connecting us soul to soul, life path criss-crossing life paths.

[Options for the conversation to follow:

- 1) Read and consider one question before going to the next; or
- 2) Choose and consider only one question; or
- 3) If you decide to consider both questions, you may not do a "go-around" for the second.]

Take a moment of silence and consider these questions.

1. How did you choose the "life souvenir" that you're sharing with this circle? Tell a story about this item and the meaning that it holds for your path.
2. Who would you like to have this some day? How does this choice enable you to "wrap your soul" around the soul of another?

What concluding thoughts would you like to share?

Feedback (10 minutes)

Thank the group. Ask what they liked in this session and what changes they would hope for. Explain that for the next session, we'll consider the topic, "The Bedrock of Your Being."

Note that the session plan for this gathering is available for group members as we leave.

Closing (1 minute)

- Go, knowing that who you are, what you hold dear, and what you pass on matters.
- Go, knowing that you are not alone, that you are woven by countless threads, soul into soul.
- Go in peace.
- Go in love.
- Go in gratitude.

Circle Ministry Session Sequence for Facilitators

First Parish Unitarian Universalist – Cohasset, MA

The suggested sequence and time allocations spelled out below will help you who facilitate our Circle Ministry sessions to ensure that every participant will have a voice over the two-hour timeframe that comprises a Circle Ministry session.

Gathering, Welcoming (5 minutes)

During the **first meeting** of your group, you might want to offer clarification on questions that people have raised:

How long do the groups meet? We're asking that each of the initial groups commit to meeting at least through May. At that time or before, you can each decide whether you want to continue in this group, move to another group, or not continue.

Why a designated facilitator and a co-facilitator? As similar groups have met in other congregations, facilitators provide assurance that each person has a voice, that we stay on topic, and that we sustain respectful dialogue. Even experiences at First Parish have taught us that groups without designated facilitators tend to fray. There are exceptions; but this is the general learning. The structure provided by facilitators is ultimately satisfying for everyone.

Introduce your co-facilitator. Clarify that this person will step in if you can't be there, and if additional congregants want to join groups and there aren't enough open spaces, s/he stands ready to be the lead facilitator for this new group.

Where will we meet regularly?

This first meeting is at [facilitator or co-facilitator]'s home. For our subsequent sessions, we're asking that one of you volunteer to be a home host. That's all you have to do! Don't clean your house for us. Don't prepare refreshments. Just open your door and welcome us in. By the end of this evening's session, I hope we'll have a home host.

How can we ensure respectful dialogue and the structure that was introduced about Circle Ministry? Our focus next week will be a behavioral covenant. I'll provide a basic covenant, and we'll go from there.

You'll continue to have questions. Toward the end of each session there will be a time to raise them.

Chalice lighting (1-2 minutes)

Check-in/Sharing (2-3 minutes@ - 20-30 minutes)

Ask each person to share **what's on their mind and heart**. You may wish to have a timekeeper to gently remind anyone who moves beyond the allotted check-in time that their sharing is valued and we need to ensure a voice for everyone. If the speaker persists, ask her/him firmly and respectfully to conclude. IF as the sessions unfold, someone arrives who has had a particularly rending experience, decide as a group your willingness to give this person extra time.

NO feedback, NO cross-talk during this segment. Simply be with each other in deep listening.

“Business” matters (up to 10 minutes)

At year's beginning, review Behavioral Covenants and session structures.

Later in the year, you'll want to discuss and plan your service projects.

Discussion (60 minutes)

Introduce the topic and the questions (2 minutes)

Ask folks to **pause and ponder** this in a period of silence. (2 minutes)

First response: Ask folks to register their initial thoughts—in random order, but with **no feedback** during this segment.

Then: Cross-conversation. IF one person dominates, gently remind that person that we need to allow time for every group member to speak.

Conclude discussion with request for **final statements/last thoughts on this topic**—in random order, but with **no feedback**.

Feedback (5-10 minutes)

Ask participants **what they liked** about this session. **What would they change? How?** Take note during succeeding sessions of **who isn't present**. Let the other members know that you'll follow up to determine if all is well or not. Remind members that if they absolutely can't make a session, to please let you know.

Closing (2 minutes)

Note: Have copies of the session available for participants at the conclusion of each session, but don't distribute them up front. If someone asks about having an outline in hand, explain that we all tend to connect more freely when we're not tied to a paper.

Thank you!

You are a valued leader in Circle Ministry as it unfolds within our faith community!