

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
“Adults Coming of Age as Unitarian Universalists”
Covenant Group Guidelines May 2011, Community Church of Chapel Hill Unitarian
Universalist, NC, Rev. Maj-Britt Johnson

CHALICE LIGHTING

We light this chalice for all who are here, and all who are not; For all who have ever walked through our doors, for those who may yet find this spiritual home, and for those we can't even yet imagine. For each of us and for us all, may this flame burn warm and bright.

-Erik Walker Wikstrom

CHECK-IN

For the one hour drop-in groups: A brief check in such as “how is it with your spirit today?”

For the two hour covenant groups: What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing. Each person in the group speaks uninterrupted for approximately ____ minutes.

OPENING THOUGHTS AND READING

This month (May 15th) our Coming of Age class will read their credos during the Sunday service. They will talk about what makes them U.U. and what they believe. The following week members of an adult program “Wellspring” will talk about their spiritual formation and identity as UU’s.

This covenant groups session is your chance to reflect on your own UU identity and how it was formed, or is forming. Fifteen years ago (or less) in our congregations we were most likely, when asked what we believe, to instead lay out what we don’t believe.

Rev. Galen Guengerich, minister at All Souls UU church in NYC writes in his sermon “Gratitude should be the center of Unitarian Universalist theology”:

“My twelve-year-old was on the playground recently with her Jewish and Catholic friends. The topic of religion came up, and they asked her what Unitarians believe. She found it hard to respond. Is there a playground-ready answer to this question?”

Unitarian Universalism often plays better to a graduate-school crowd than a middle-school crowd. Part of the reason for the enigmatic nature of our theology is that we haven’t worked hard enough to make it clear and simple. I am reminded of a minister who, when asked why he preached a 45-minute sermon, replied, “Because I didn’t have enough time to write a 20-minute sermon.” But there is another reason why this question is difficult. If your child’s friends (and their Muslim playmate) answered the same question about their own faiths, they would probably talk about a God who is revealed through a written scripture (the Torah, the New Testament, the Qur’an) and represented on earth by a prophet or messiah figure (Moses, Jesus, Mohammed).

Unitarian Universalism has none of these concrete and uniquely defining elements. Instead, our prevailing—dare I say orthodox—view insists on our freedom to believe whatever we want. Indeed, I asked my very own daughter what Unitarians believe, and her answer was orthodox to a fault. Zoë replied, “We believe whatever we want to believe.” This answer is not good enough, and it certainly doesn’t work on the playground. It’s as if your daughter’s friend asked, “Where do you live?” and she responded, “I’m free to live wherever I want.

...If we have any sense of mission, we need to be able to say what we believe in language that is positive, relevant, and even playground-friendly. By positive, I mean that we must talk about something other than freedom, which is the absence of something such as coercion. People may be attracted to Unitarian Universalism because we don't believe in a doctrine they find abhorrent. But they won't stay because of what's missing. (People don't go to Carnegie Hall because of what they won't hear.)"

UU's still have a hard time saying who we are as a group, but these days we're more likely to have a spiritual practice, and/or claim a theology, and to be willing to share that with others. As we do so, I believe our connections begin to emerge, we gain strength from each other, find food for the journey, inspiration for action, and greater clarity as a faith tradition.

QUESTIONS

See if one of the following questions calls out to you:

What would you say makes you a U.U.?

What for you is the fullness of Unitarian Universalism? ie. what "music" do you hear here?

What was your journey like getting to where you are today, as a UU?

GUIDELINES FOR SHARING – (leader reads these guidelines, or has another person do it, then s/he can repeat the questions again)

We'll each speak for about _____ minutes, with no cross talk or interruptions. Cross talk means advice giving, blaming, or trying to fix another person. It is wise to speak in the first person, "I think, I feel..." to avoid cross talking.

When we are listening: Let others' words simply fall down into your heart. It is not necessary to give the person reassurances that they are being heard, such as nodding or eye contact. By simply listening together we create a holding space for each speaker. Comfort and care can be offered after the group session, but during the session may actually interfere with an individual's discernment.

When it is your turn to speak it is not necessary to respond to the persons who have gone before you, though you may find yourself building on what has been shared already. Find out what your own inner wisdom wants to say. Together we create a quilt of wisdom, the design is a surprise.

(Leader can re-read the questions here)

SHARING - around the circle

-After everyone has shared (some groups go around twice, or more)...

LIKES AND WISHES – What did you like about this session? What would you wish to be different if anything?

CLOSING WORDS

"Belief is many things," said one of our modern leaders, A. Powell Davies, "and so is disbelief. But religion is something that happens to you when you open your mind to truth, your conscience to justice, and your heart to love." In Unitarian Universalist congregations we do not try to make one another fit a given pattern of experience. But we do discover together that there are religious dimensions in all our varied human experience.

– from A Chosen Faith by John Buehrens and Forrest Church.