

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

***Aging***

*Adapted from the Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco*  
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)**

Day passes into day,  
becomes night slipping into night.  
Eternity happens.

This nanosecond of life is precious and fleeting.

Can we embrace it without grasping?  
Can we fill it without cramming?  
Can we ingest it without gorging?  
Can we receive it without hoarding?  
Can we let it be without fretting?  
Can we let it go with grace—  
gratified, grateful?

Shall we be together as we try?

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

**Service ventures (10 minutes)**

If you haven't already begun to do so, explore what your group's focus will be for a service venture benefitting this congregation and a service venture benefitting our larger community.

**Topical Discussion (60 minutes)**

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

First response  
Cross-conversation

**Topic: Aging**

Madeleine L'Engle, whose classic book, *A Wrinkle in Time*, captivated the imaginations of children of all ages, published 60 books in her lifetime, a lifetime that spanned the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She had much to say about time and its passing; she had much to say about aging. It was in *A Circle of Quiet* that she wrote:

"I am still every age that I have been. Because I was once a child, I am always a child. Because I was once a searching adolescent, given to moods and ecstasies, these are still part of me, and always will be... This does not mean that I ought to be trapped or enclosed in any of these ages... but that they are in me to be drawn on... Far too many people... think that forgetting what it is like to think and feel and touch and smell and taste and see and hear like a three-year-old or a thirteen-year-old or a twenty-three-year-old means being grownup. When I'm with these people I... feel that if this is what it means to be a grown-up, then I

don't ever want to be one. Instead of which, if I can retain a child's awareness and joy, and be fifty-one, then I will really learn what it means to be grownup."

Fifty-one may sound like a "young chick" to some of us and elderly indeed to others. For Madeleine L'Engle, 51 stretched into an age just shy of 89.

When we were children, time passed ever so slowly. How we longed to be "grown up" and do grown up things. It happened quickly. We're grown-ups, more or less. Aging is inevitable if we are among the fortunate. How we age is a shifting venture of choice and circumstance.

[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.]

1. What has been your experience of aging over the past decade of your life? What surprises has it held?
2. What frightens you about aging? What comforts you about aging?

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, "Love's Edge."

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

### **Closing (1 minute)**

Aging is the consequence,  
for better or worse,  
of not dying younger than you are right now.  
Go in peace.  
Go with 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!**