



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network

## **BLUE MIND - Our Connection with Water**

Small Group Conversations, Anne Bailey coordinator

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**(TOPIC READINGS start on p. 4)**

### **OUR SMALL GROUP MISSION**

These Small Group conversations are offered as a way to get to know each other better, as we explore the various topics selected by our Small Group Team, related to our life experiences, questions, joys, and challenges. We are free to share our thoughts and feelings, joys and struggles, as we choose, and are here to listen to and care about each other. (We are NOT here to be a therapy group ~ or to tackle “church politics”!)

We look forward to building closer connections with each other, as we spend this time together, and form new or deeper friendships and build our sense of community.

### **OUR SMALL GROUP COVENANT**

As members of this Small Group of the Universalist Church, we covenant with each other to help make this experience both personally and spiritually rewarding, to nourish our sense of community, and to learn and practice right relationship.

We will try to arrive before the beginning of each session so that it can start on time. We will try to attend all of the meetings of our group unless we are ill or away, and will let the group know in advance when that will occur or by contacting the facilitator:

#### **Facilitator Contact information:**

We use these guidelines for sharing, as a pathway to a caring community:

- We will deeply listen and ask honest and open questions.
- We will respect confidentiality. What is said here stays here, unless we agree to share something outside of our group.
- We will allow others to speak without interruption.
- We will not try to fix, save, advise or correct.
- We will honor time for reflection and quietness and respect a member’s right to remain silent, as they choose.
- We will treat others with respect and without judgment.
- We will honor the diversity of thought and feeling and values among us.

### **CHECK IN**

Check-in is a time to deepen our connections with each other by sharing joys, sorrows, challenges, and changes in our lives. Sharing is not required. Only share if you are comfortable. What is shared in group is confidential.

Connection is the energy created between people when they feel seen, heard, valued and understood. One of the goals of small group is to move out of our heads and into our hearts in order to deepen our connections with one other.

Authentic sharing from a place of honesty and vulnerability allows us to build a community of trust, caring, and belonging. The connections we build with one another become contagious. They grow and spread and infuse our larger church community with life and vitality.

## 1. WELCOME / INTRODUCTIONS :

Let's remember to **Silence cell phones!** **Speak up** clearly, so all can hear.

**Remind folks to let us know and to remind us if they have a hearing issue or if we aren't speaking up enough, so we can be aware.**

### • At FIRST SESSION of the series: Let's introduce ourselves:

"Tell us a bit about yourself, for example:"

- Your name, where you live and how long you've been in this area
- How long have you been a UU, coming to our church
- Your family, what you do (or did) for work, any special passions or hobbies  
(Model this by starting with yourself.)

Distribute MISSION/COVENANT/CHECK IN handout.

- Read the MISSION statement orally - volunteers read COVENANT
- Remind folks to contact the facilitator if you are unable to come to a session (if not included, give them your contact info. to add to their copy)
- Read the CHECK-IN orally, in turn.
- "Since time has been spent on introductions today (tonight), we'll keep our check-in short"; ex. "Might you have a joy or feeling of gratitude you can share with us?"

## 2. CHECK IN: (at 2nd and later sessions: repeat names again, if needed, and read the following aloud, as you choose):

*Check-in is a time to deepen our connections with each other by sharing joys, sorrows, challenges, and changes in our lives. Sharing is not required. Only share if you are comfortable. What is shared in group is confidential.*

Some CHECK-IN PROMPTS:

- *How have these past couple of weeks gone for you?*
- *Can you share some of your "highs" and/or "lows"?*
- *Has anything brought you a sense of gratitude or accomplishment? - of joy - or sorrow?*

## 3. OPENING: Use "chime" or bell to quiet folks; LIGHT CANDLE:

**(3 reading choices below, you might vary this from session to session)**

- *May "our separate fires kindle one flame" as we gather in this circle—bringing our stories, our reflections, our hopes and our struggles.  
May our candle flame lend light and promise for our time together.*  
~~~~~
- *May we know once again that we are not isolated beings, but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe, to this community and to each other.*  
~~~~~
- *May our time together bring learning, understanding, compassion, encouragement, and hope as we share about our life journeys and passions.*

**4. CENTERING:** *In preparation for our conversation, let's take a few moments to center ourselves and be thankful for this time we have together in community.*

*Please get comfortable, place both feet solidly on the floor, rest your hands on your thighs and let your shoulders drop. Gently close your eyes or focus on a spot a few feet in front of you on the floor. Bring your attention to the flow of your breath.*

*Breathing in I calm my body.  
Breathing out I smile.*

*Dwelling in this present moment,  
I know this is a wonderful moment.*

*Our life's path is not one we travel alone. We are in it together, and the company of spiritual friends helps us feel our interconnectedness.*

**Ring the chime:** *"Slowly open your eyes."*

**5. DISTRIBUTE READING:**

Ask for **volunteers to read the paragraphs aloud, in turn.** You might include a **pause after the reading,** to allow time to reflect before responding.

**6. POSE QUESTIONS** to prompt sharing, invite folks to respond if and as they choose; If you choose, you can **split readings into sections,** with questions/conversation as you go along (some readings are already done this way).

**Encourage silent spaces** between reflections; be comfortable with silence.

You might prompt: **"Take some time to think about that."** - or the like.

**FEEL FREE TO ADJUST or ADAPT THE QUESTIONS PROVIDED**

You may not get to all of them, or you may want to modify them slightly or skip around a bit, even make up a new question, depending on what comes up in the conversation, to keep it moving along.

**KEEPING YOUR GROUP ON TRACK:** If a group member should go on and on, or responds inappropriately so that **conversation needs redirection,** gently ask that they give others an opportunity to share or say something like:

- **"Let's reconsider the question"**
- **"Let's stop now and take a moment to reflect."**
- **"Thank you for sharing your thoughts. Now let's move on".**

You can also make reference to the covenant.

*(If you are co-facilitating, work out a collaboration system with your partner, such as: when the other is facilitating, feel free to help guide the conversation, step in if you see a need to redirect.)*

**If the conversation has slowed down,** you as facilitator can model responses to help the conversation along. **Some prompts could be:**

- **What are your thoughts about that?**
- **Can you say more about that?**
- **How does it make you feel?**
- **What does it make you think of?**

If the topic is really not going well, turn it back to the group:

- **"What do you want to do with this topic?"**

**TOPIC READINGS start on next page:**

## 8. BLUE MIND - Our special connection with water

Of my grandfather's (Jacques Cousteau) many famous quotes, these are the two I hear, read, and see emblazoned on walls and websites most often:

"The sea, once it casts its spell, holds one in its net of wonder forever."

"People protect what they love."

The first is about that magical enchantment so many people feel toward the water. The second is about survival - protecting what we love is a basic instinct to humans (just ask any parent). Taken together, these two ideas explain the lives of many aquatic scientists: they are pulled in and fall in love with the water world and dedicate themselves to protecting it. And yet, in an effort to remain unbiased, neutral, and impartial, they wouldn't think to investigate what's behind the passion for their work.

The same is true for millions of nonscientists who choose to go to the water's edge for a vacation. Most don't consider why this is where they best relax replenish, and rejuvenate. They don't question that they're getting something cognitively enriching from being by the water that goes way beyond sitting in a beach chair with a best-selling novel. They just know they love and need unplugged water time.

Neuroscientists and psychologists are now producing research data that shows that our brains are hardwired to react positively to water and that being near it can calm and connect us, increase innovation and insight, and even heal what's broken. Healthy water is crucial to our physiological and psychological well-being, as well as our ecology and economy. We have a "blue mind" - and it's perfectly tailored to make us happy in all sorts of ways that go far beyond relaxing in the surf, listening to the murmur of a stream, or floating quietly in a pool.

Because our love of the water is so pervasive, so consistent, it can seem that asking why is a question that needs no answer. But once you begin to go deeper (no pun intended!), things are not as simple as we might initially think. We love the rhythmic sound of waves breaking on the beach, but why does *that* sound relax us more than nearly every other? How might our preference for the flat surface of a lake be rooted in prehistoric hunting patterns? Why does understanding the science of somatic tension help explain the pleasure we feel when submerged?

The sea, once it casts its spell, does indeed hold us in its net of wonder forever. People do protect what they love. Now it's time for us to update my grandfather's prescient words by explaining them, and, by doing so, changing our understanding and our consciousness or our place on the planet, who we are, and what goes on inside and between us. It's about reconnecting our sense of self and soul with our waterways and our oceans. It's about finding creativity, clarity, and confidence in our deep Blue Minds.

~ *Celine Cousteau, in the forward to "Blue Mind", by Wallace C. Nichols:*

One of the many possible ways to describe a life would be as a series of encounters with various bodies of water. Time spent in, on, under, or near water interspersed with the periods spent thinking about water, when, and how to reach it next. My first body of water, or course, was experience in my mother's womb. And the last - at least as I now imagine it - will be in the form of ashes, cast over the Pacific.

In between, I've been fascinated by and privileged to know many ponds, lakes, streams, buckets, waterfall, quarries, tubs, mists, oceans, downpours, and puddles. As children we delight in water. As we grow older, water also becomes the matrix for sport, relaxation, and romance.

People have a deep emotional connection to the sea. The oceans inspire, thrill, and soothe us. Some think we owe our clever brains and the success they brought to our ancestors' close link to the sea. But our relationship with the sea stretches back through time much further than this: all the way to the origins of life itself. We are creatures of the ocean. ~ Callum Roberts, *"The Ocean of Life"*.

In the waves and the rivers and the lakes and the ponds we see what was, what is, and what is beyond us. Now we must figure out ways to make sure we are also seeing what will be.

Preserving, protecting, and restoring our waters are tasks for many lifetimes, and sometimes the effort can seem overwhelming. But as long as we stay connected with all of the many, many blessings that water provides, and continue to keep that love in the forefront of our minds and hearts, as long as we continue to hope, then our stories will help connect others to water and encourage them to do what they can to help care for this beautiful Blue Marble world.

If you just sit and observe, you will see how restless your mind is," Steve Jobs explained.

"If you try to calm it, it only makes it worse, but over time it does calm, and when it does, there's room to hear more subtle things - that's when your intuition starts to blossom and you start to see things more clearly and be in the present more. Your mind just slows down down, and you see a tremendous expanse in the moment. You see so much more than you could before." And there is no wider panorama than what we see when we look outward from the beach. ~ Wallace C. Nichols, *"Blue Mind"*

### **QUESTIONS:**

- What are some experiences with water that these readings bring to mind for you?
- Do you have different reactions depending on the nature of the water you are viewing or experiencing (i.e. ocean, lake, pond, river, creek, vernal pool)?
- Are you happy to just look upon a body of water, or do you also like to be involved with it - moving with it or in it - such as sailing, paddling, fishing, swimming, etc.?
- How might you explain our special connection with water?
- What concerns do you have re. the future of our water resources on this planet? Are there ways, large or small, that we individuals can play a part in protecting them?

**As CONVERSATION comes to an end**, you might ask for **last thoughts on the topic**:

*"Do you have a thought from this conversation that you will carry home with you?"*

**CLOSING on next page:**

## **CLOSING (have read by a volunteer in group):**

I found one of my best teachers on the boardwalk at Coney Island many years ago. It was December, and I was doing a story about how the homeless suffer in the winter months. He and I sat on the edge of the wooden supports, dangling our feet over the side, and he told me about his schedule, panhandling the boulevard when the summer crowds were gone, sleeping in a church when the temperature went below freezing, hiding from the police amid the Tilt-A-Whirl and the Cyclone and some of the other seasonal rides.

But he told me that most of the time he stayed on the boardwalk, facing the water, just the way we were sitting here now, even when it got cold and he had to wear his newspapers after he read them. And I asked him why. Why didn't he go to one of the shelters? Why didn't he check himself into the hospital for detox?

And he stared out at the ocean and said, "Look at the view, young lady. Look at the view."

And every day, in some little way, I try to do what he said. I try to look at the view. That's all. Words of wisdom from a man with not a dime in his pocket, no place to go, nowhere to be. Look at the view. When I do what he said, I am never disappointed.

*~ Anna Quindlen, "A Short Guide to a Happy Life"*

## **RING CHIME and EXTINGUISH CANDLE** (Choose one of these or one of your choice)

*As our time together comes to a close, we give thanks for one another, for the chance to share our lives, and to renew our spirits in the company of friends. May we go forth enriched by our gathering, committed to living life fully, to loving life with more passion, and to supporting one another.*

OR

*Remembering that the universe is so much larger than our ability to comprehend, let us go forth from this time together with the resolve to stop trying to reduce the incomprehensible to our own petty expectations, so that wonder -- that sense of what is sacred -- can find space to open up our minds and illumine our lives.*

OR

*May we value our shared reflections and take away new understandings of ourselves, each other, and our being together. Thank you for sharing your story. Thank you for creating a place of safety. Thank you for listening with appreciation.*

## **ANNOUNCE NEXT SESSION'S TOPIC: (unless last session)**

**Ask for a volunteer to bring in a CLOSING reading (if needed) for this next session** (It can be something they particularly like, doesn't necessarily have to relate to the topic.)

**if providing SNACKS, ask for a volunteer**