

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Circle Ministry 2009-2010

*The Bedrock of Your Being*

*Adapted from the session plan of Rev. Amy Bowden Freedman*

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)**

Our chalice flame flickers as we move in and out of holidays,

We lean into Solstice, before which light grows less,  
after which light simply grows.

We move through a season of light shifting.

We move through a season when some say the Light of the World arrived.

We move through a season when some celebrate a legendary miracle of light  
lasting beyond all expectation.

We gather in the glow of the light that burns at the center of our circle.

And we wonder:

What is holy?

The flame? Light itself? What it holds?

And we ask:

What is at the center, the very center of the flame?

What is at the center, the very center of this circle?

What is at the center, the very center of each of us?

**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: The Bedrock of Your Being**

I offer you the words of Eric Heller-Wagner:

Blessed is the fire that burns deep in the soul.

It is the flame of the human spirit

touched in being by the mystery of life.

It is the fire of reason;

The fire of compassion;

The fire of community;

The fire of justice;

The fire of faith

It is the fire of love

burning deep in the human heart;

the divine glow in every life.

How does our Unitarian Universalist faith help you experience your “divine glow?” What is your divine glow? Sometimes we call it “the bedrock of your being.”

Unitarian Universalism is a “living tradition” that “draws from many sources.” Among them are “direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life.” We don’t rely on external authority but on our own experience of the transcendent. We renew our spirits through opening our hearts and minds to what is life affirming. In living this faith, we tend to find help and hope in what we trust at our deepest core and what we discover in community with other seekers of truth and meaning.

For the purpose of this session, let’s focus on what is life affirming for us personally. What renews your spirit? What grounds you? What is your “bedrock” in the face of a great grief, a whirlwind of tragedy, or an experience that rocks you to the core? What is it that allows you to move through some horrific “valley of the shadow” and emerge?

[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.]

Find a comfortable pose and close your eyes. Consider these questions as we hold three minutes of silence:

1. What is it within our Unitarian Universalist faith that grounds you? In other words, what is “the bedrock of your being” in the face of struggle, crisis, grief and despair? What does it feel like?
2. Describe a time when you discovered “the bedrock of your being” and it allowed you to surface from an experience you perhaps didn’t know you could survive.

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, “Taking Down the Tree.”

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

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

- Go, assured that you hold a radiant core.
- Go, assured that there is a faith community that cherishes who you are.
- Go, assured that you have a bedrock of being, perhaps beyond your imagining.
- Go in peace.
- Go in hope.

## 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!**