

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

Before and After

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)

If there's a perfect shape,
I believe it's the circle—
 all points on the circumference
 being equal in their distance from the center,
 or is it in their closeness to the center?

What I wonder is how many circles there are
 that share the same center,
 the same life core?

Across the universe there may be countless suns,
but for the sake of argument, imagine
 that there is one life core,
 bursting with energy out and across
 an infinite number of circles,
 each with an infinite number of points.

Rather like the view of Black Elk
 atop the highest mountain
 seeing "that the sacred hoop of [his] people
 was one of many hoops
 that make one circle,
 wide as daylight and starlight,"
and in whose center "grew one mighty flowering tree
 to shelter all the children
 of one mother and one father."

One family we are amid circles vast, infinite, and intimate.

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

Service ventures & May 7 potluck (10 minutes)

If you haven't already done so, confirm your group's focus for the community service venture
(All groups have completed their congregational service venture.)
Clarify also how many from your group will attend the May 7 potluck,
and remind them of what you agreed to contribute.

Topical Discussion (60 minutes)

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

 First response
 Cross-conversation

Topic: Before and After

No, this isn't about weighing 300 pounds and losing 150. It's about pivot points of a different sort. That is, before X happened life was such and such. After X happened, life was never the same, with "never the same" being not necessarily good or bad, just never the same.

We often mark the two or three most pivotal points of our lives as crises. Always these crises are personal; sometimes they touch vast numbers of people, like the events of 9/11/01 or the January 12, 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

For Jerry White, who grew up in Cohasset, it was personal and communal. In *I Will Not Be Broken*, Jerry wrote about what it took and what he counsels to overcome a life crisis, his own transformative "before and after." He speaks of being a survivor. As the cofounder of Survivor Corps, Jerry has spoken at the United Nations and before Congress and has written eloquently "to help survivors heal and get on with their lives." What was his "before and after?" In his book, *I Will Not Be Broken*, he wrote that on April 12, 1984 at the age of 20,

"I stepped on a landmine during a camping trip in Israel. Physically, it took a part of my leg. But it also divided my life in two—everything became either *before* or *after* the accident. It also taught me important things about resilience and coping that would later be the impetus for my work with survivors. I learned to walk on a fake leg, and then how to live and be happy despite the horror of that minefield. I returned to school, got married, had children, and worked hard to support my family."

During a trip to Cambodia 12 years later, Jerry met amputees galore. A little girl hopped up to him on a "homemade crutch," pointed at his expensive "fake leg" and looking up at him with a broad smile said, "You are one of us." Jerry began to build the Landmine Survivors Network, an effort "to ban the use of landmines and help survivors get legs and find work." Jerry's "after" was marked by "growth and renewal." His life was never the same.

(See Jerry White, *I Will Not Be Broken: 5 Steps to Overcoming a Life Crisis*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2008.)

[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. How would you describe what marks a "before and after" in your life? Why was this such a pivotal event for you? Did it happen only to you or do you share this "before and after" with many others?
2. How has the quality of your life changed through this experience? How do you feel about it?

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 revisit "Siblings," a much appreciated topic from 2007-2008. Note that the session plan for this gathering is available for group members as we leave.

Closing (1 minute)

- Go knowing that we are glad that you survived.
- Go knowing that we are grateful for what you learned.
- Go knowing that we celebrate the wisdom you have gleaned and the moments of joy that life still serves up for us all.

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!