

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Circle Ministry

*Caring & Covenant*

Rev. Jan Carlsson-Bull for Circle Ministry at First Parish UU Cohasset, MA

Adapted from the session plan on Caring developed by Rev. Amy Bowden Freeman

**Note: See the Circle Ministry Session Sequence for process guidelines.**

**Gathering, Welcoming (2 minutes)**

**Chalice lighting (1 minute)**

**Opening words (1 minute)**

Spirit of life and love that lives in us and in all people, be present with us this day.

Help us to be grateful for all that we have,

grateful for this time of connection,

grateful for these friends, and for all who enrich our lives.

Spirit of life, be present with us as compassion,

that we may open our hearts, listen with care, and be truly present with one another.

Be present with us as generosity of spirit,

that we may meet the world with good will.

Be present with us as vision,

so that we may see beyond this moment

and beyond the limits of our own day to day concerns,

and remember, once again, that we are part of a larger world, and all that lies therein.

The words of Rev. Calvin Dame

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

**Discussion (60 minutes)**

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

First response

Cross-conversation

**Topic: Caring**

One of the goals of Circle Ministry is to get to know one another better and to offer caring support to one another. Each one of us comes to this circle with unique experiences, a distinct temperament, and our own personality style. Each one of us has learned ways of relating to others and coping with loss, crisis, and transition—ways that have and haven't worked for us. When we're experiencing loss, crisis, and transition, we sometimes want others to read our mind and heart, to care for us as we feel we need to be cared for. This rarely happens, difficult as it usually is for others to know what we want and to respond in kind. How do we determine what any of us need or think we need when moving through one of life's bottlenecks?

The Golden Rule states: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Let's turn that into a few questions. What would each of us like to have done unto us? What makes sense to each one of us in terms of our individual style and the history of our individual experiences in receiving care and support that we felt was genuinely helpful?

Take a few moments of silence and ponder your responses to these questions:

1. What have you learned is the most helpful kind of caring for you?
2. Tell a story that illustrates how you succeeded or failed to meet someone's true need, and reflect on and share what you learned from this experience.

(Read through both 1 and 2 and choose for discussion the questions that best fit your group.)

### **Revisiting our Behavioral Covenant**

Share with your group the following:

At our last gathering you received the sample behavioral covenant. While there are elements of that covenant that are core to our Circle Ministry at First Parish, you may wish to add to it or modify it so as to lift up particular hopes and concerns that you bring to this circle.

For our circle to work for everyone, it must be grounded in trust, which overlaps with the caring that we've been discussing. Trust and effective caring don't just happen. They're intentional. They unfold from the keeping of well thought out promises. The more intentional we are, the more likely we'll keep the promises we might make, implicitly and explicitly, at the outset of these relationships. This is how trust grows. This is how we care effectively. What do our promises look like? Like a behavioral covenant.

Take a few moments to review this sample covenant. We'll then move into a discussion of our purpose and promises in terms of our baseline document and shape it in a way that works for us.

[See Circle Ministry Session Sequence for clarification of this next segment.]

First response

Cross-conversation

Concluding statements

[During the cross-conversation, be sure to cover all the areas of the baseline document: respect for one another's time; commitment to attend; sharing "airtime;" general respect; and service to others. Move toward a covenant of consensus by which everyone can "live the Circle." This might not mean full agreement, but willingness for some to live with a particular part of the covenant if "x" is modified, albeit with the affirmation of the others. The desired end is a document that works for the whole group.]

What concluding thoughts would you like to share?

### **Feedback (15 minutes)**

Thank the group for their feedback. Explain that each group member will have a copy of the final covenant by/at the next session and that we may from time to time place this written covenant near the circle's chalice as a reminder of our agreements.

Ask what they liked in this session and what variations they would hope for.

Explain that for the next session, we'll consider the topic, "Our Parents, Ourselves."

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

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

As we close, I offer you the words of Calvin Dame:

As we leave this place and this company, may the fellowship of this circle carry us forward, remind us of that which we hold to be most sacred, and encourage us every hour, until such time as we meet again. Amen.

## Circle Ministry Session Sequence for Facilitators

### First Parish Unitarian Universalist – Cohasset

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!**