

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Family Hand-Me-Downs
First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA. March 2023

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

“Yesterday, our distant ancestors gathered round a flame to share their stories and find comfort.

Tomorrow, our descendants will gather round a flame, talking of a life we will never know.

But today, it is we who gather here, around this flame; seeking, believing, and being, together.” — *uua.org*

Check-in/Sharing: This is the time to mention any issues or events on your mind that you would like to share. Invite group to agree to covenant. Briefly mention community service. Read “Deep Listening” poem together.

Topic: Family Hand-Me-Downs

In the families that raised us, many of their goals, values, expectations, roles, approaches to problems, and ways of communicating and relating have been handed down from past generations. Some of these approaches are helpful, some not so helpful. Some may be funny, some unknown outside our family. While they may be just the way things “have always been done”, sometimes extended family can help us appreciate the context in which they developed.

As children, visiting relatives and friends showed us ways in which families differed, such as in how they handled meals, chores, free time, family activities, and family rules. Living with others can challenge us to identify what is important about the values, expectations, hopes, and approaches we bring from the families that raised us, and find new ways to go forward together.

“What families have in common [...] is that they are the places where people learn who they are and how to be that way.” — *Jean Illsley Clarke*

“It’s important to teach our children their heritage. Who are your ancestors? What were their traditions? Each of us has a story to tell. If these stories are unwritten, then how are your children going to know of their parentage?” — *Linda Weaver Clarke*

“To my father, who told me the stories that matter. To my mother, who taught me to remember them.” — *Marita Golden*

“She had to choose what, of the things she inherited from the people who came before her, she wanted to bring forward. And what, of the past, she wanted to leave behind.” — *Taylor Jenkins Reid*

“In truth, a family is what you make it. It is made strong, not by number of heads counted at the dinner table, but by the rituals you help family members create, by the memories you share, by the commitment of time, caring, and love you show to one another, and by the hopes for the future you have as individuals and as a unit.” —*Marge Kennedy*

“do i laugh like my great grandfather, because that's the way my grandma laughed, and my mom copied her? ... i wonder which of my little mannerisms came from ancestors long passed, and i wonder which of mine will echo in family descendants long after i'm gone.” — *Anon*

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- Could you share any stories, sayings, or “words of wisdom” handed down by your family that affected how you were brought up or how you have chosen to live your life?
- Do you have practical skills, communication, or coping abilities that you credit to your family or past generations? Did your family have roles, tasks or traits attached to different family members? Have you seen any patterns in these from extended family or in your adult life?
- Were there things you were surprised by when you went to a friend’s house or left home that others did differently?
- Living with roommates or partners, what have you worked out to include everyone’s important family hand-me-downs?
- Does your original family have special traditions around holidays? How have you reconciled traditions with a spouse, partner, or friends?
- Could you share any ways in which you, your parents, or an earlier generation have consciously chosen to break with a family pattern or tradition - in the way they lived their lives, chose careers, raised families, spent time or communicated?

(Group will take a few minutes to consider topic and questions and then share).

Wrapping Up: How did you like this topic and session?

Closing Words

“Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another city.” —
George Burns