

Circle Ministry 2008-2009

Fathers

Rev. Jan Carlsson-Bull for Circle Ministry at First Parish UU Cohasset, MA
Adapted from the session plan used by the First Unitarian Society in Newton, MA
and created by Bob Zeeb

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

Gathering, Welcoming (2 minutes)

Chalice lighting & Opening words (1 minute)

*“Honor your father and your mother,
that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your god gives you.”*
Such is fifth commandment of those given by God to Moses,
according to the biblical Book of Exodus.

Whether we buy into the moral truth of this roster of moral proclamations or not,
we’re given a vivid glimpse into what mattered a few thousand years ago
to our religious ancestors.

Parents mattered.

Parents were to be honored.

Whether we loved them or not, they were deemed by religious authority
as worthy of honor.

In this circle, we honor each other.

We listen.

We refrain from cross-talk.

We digest each other’s words and stories.

We begin to recognize the spaces between the words and the silences of stories untold.

We build trust by heeding and hearing and telling our own stories.

We know what it is not to be judged because we are who we are.

We cultivate the practice of honoring one another.

Let’s hold for moment what this circle teaches us about honoring and about being honorable
as we consider Fathers—having them, being them, knowing them,
honoring them, even loving them.

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: Fathers

We have all had fathers of one sort or another who were present or not present for us. Some of us may never have known our birth father. Some of us may have been raised by a stepfather. Some of us may have been raised by two fathers, two mothers, a mother only, or an aunt, or grandparents, or foster caregivers. Yet we all had fathers, who sired us for sure and raised us perhaps and loved us maybe.

Some of us are fathers. Whether we're biological fathers or adoptive fathers or stepfathers or mentor/fathers, those of us who are men have likely had some experience of fathering.

Consider now the father or fathers you've had. Perhaps you count yourself blessed to have had a father or fathers such as yours. Perhaps you feel otherwise. Perhaps your feelings about your Dad/Dads are a mixed and chaotic bag. Whatever the case, we were all shaped by our fathers and still are, in complex and sometimes barely discernible ways. The stories of our relationships with our fathers are as textured as the stories of our relationship with our mothers; every story is in some way a story of "gift and grief." What is your story?

[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.]

Take a moment of silence and consider these questions.

1. Who is/was your father or fathers to the extent that you know or knew him/them? What images come to mind? Tell a story that captures the essence of your relationship.
2. How has your image of your father—or maybe fathers—affected how you have chosen to live your life?

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, "Race and Class."

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

Closing (1 minute)

from the poetry of Wendell Berry:

A Praise
 His memories lived in the place
 like fingers locked in the rock ledges
 like roots. When he died
 and his influence entered the air
 I said, Let my mind be the earth
 of his thought, let his kindness
 go ahead of me. Though I do not escape
 the history barbed in my flesh,
 certain wise movements of his hands,
 the turns of his speech
 keep with me. His hope of peace
 keeps with me in harsh days,
 the shell of his breath dimming away
 three summers in the earth.

Go in love. Go in peace.

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!