

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
Circle Ministry 2008-2009

*Fear*

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)**

These are turbulent times.

How to move through them mindfully and gracefully?

“In this turbulent time,” writes Margaret Wheatley, “we crave connection; we long for peace; we want the means to walk through the chaos intact. ....The peace we seek is found in experiencing ourselves as part of something bigger and wiser than our little crazed self. The community we belong to is all of life....”

Sacred experiences give us what we need to live in this strange yet wondrous time. We need as many sacred moments as we can find. We invite these moments when we open to life and to each other. In those grace-filled moments of greeting, we know we’re part of all this, and that it’s all right.”

As we gather on this [morning/afternoon/evening], let us open to life and to each other.

**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: Fear**

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” ring the words of Franklin Delano Roosevelt during some of the most anxiety-ridden days of our nation.

“Fear,” writes Forrest Church, “is as contagious as it can be toxic. ....Yet only when fear lifts can the human heart open and thrive.”

What then is the antidote to fear? Margaret Wheatley suggests that it comes in “experiencing ourselves as part of something bigger and wiser than our little crazed self.” It comes through “sacred experiences,” “sacred moments,” “grace-filled moments,” which we invite when we “open to life and each other.” Fear is vanquished in love experienced as the sacred in community.

[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. Describe a time in your life when you felt intense fear and how you moved through and beyond this feeling and this time.
2. When has fear served you as a protective positive emotion, and when has fear been an emotion that leaves you at greater risk?

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, "The Middle of the Night." Note that the session plan for this gathering is available for group members as we leave.

**Closing (1 minute)**

Nothing is sure, and nothing is ever really ours. It never was. It never will be. Yet, as we lean across our kitchen tables, as we lean across our circles, we take in the outpourings of fear and uncertainty and the stories of how we have moved through such times before, and depart assured that we are seated at a table and present in a circle far larger than we could possibly have imagined. Here we have found what will carry us through this day and into the rest of our days. Here we have found love. 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!**