

Circle Ministry Session Plan

Friendship

Rev. Jan Carlsson-Bull for Circle Ministry at First Parish UU Cohasset, MA, 8/8/2013

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

Gathering, Welcoming (2 minutes)

Chalice lighting (1 minute)

Opening reading (1 minute)

What is it to be a friend? Hear the words of that master of words and ideas and 19th century Unitarian, Ralph Waldo Emerson, has to offer in his essay on friendship:

“We have a great deal more kindness than is ever spoken. Maugre all the selfishness that chills like east winds the world, the whole human family is bathed with an element of love like a fine ether. How many persons we meet in houses, whom we scarcely speak to, whom yet we honor, and who honor us! How many we see in the street, or sit with in church, whom, though silently, we warmly rejoice to be with! Read the language of these wandering eye-beams. The heart knoweth.

....I do not wish to treat friendships daintily, but with roughest courage. When they are real, they are not glass threads or frost-work, but the solidest thing we know.”

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

Concluding statements

Topic: Friendship

What is it to be a friend? What is a healthy friendship? Why is such a friendship sometimes hard to sustain?

The research psychologist, John M. Gottman, has spent over twenty years looking at the key elements of healthy relationships between spouses, lovers, children, siblings, colleagues, and friends. In his book, *The Relationship Cure*, Gottman posits that the most delightful – and volatile – aspect of friendship is the voluntary nature of it all. Whether it’s a cup of coffee, a lavish gift, or an offer to stay by your sickbed, favors from friends are intentional acts of generosity. Friends are not obligated to us by law, economics, or family bonds. Our friends turn toward our bids for connection simply because they want to, and that’s what makes those relationships rewarding.

By the same token, our friendships often suffer from a lack of time because of all our other commitments and obligations. So it often takes a bit of extra effort and creative thought to find opportunities for turning toward your friends.

Consider in silence for awhile these questions:

How would you describe the friendships that have lasted long and that you most value?

What have you learned from friendships that you initially valued but that didn't last?

Why do you think Emerson felt friendships should be treated "with roughest courage?"

How does this understanding connect with Gottman's claim that "the most delightful – and volatile – aspect of friendship" is its voluntary nature?"

What experiences can you draw on that reflect the time you have devoted to your friendships? The imagination?

[You may want to proceed in four phases, beginning with the first question, continuing with the second, moving on to the next two (on Emerson and Gottman's claims), and concluding with the third question?]

For our concluding thoughts: How are you a good friend?

Feedback (15 minutes)

Thank the group.... Ask what they liked and what variations they would hope for.

Explain that for the next session, we'll consider the topic "Money."

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

Closing (1 minute)

Friendship is a spiritual and practical matter. The third century theologian, Eusebius understood this well:

“....may I be the friend
of that which is eternal and abides.
....May I never fail a friend.
May I respect myself.”

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!