

Circle Ministry 2008-2009

Home

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 Holly Zeeb

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

Gathering, Welcoming (2 minutes)

Chalice lighting & Opening words (1 minute)

'tis a season of homecomings,
when we gather around common tables
and forge uncommon memories—
some of them blessings, some of them otherwise,
home being what it is.

Let us gather now in a common circle
and forge uncommon connections,
uncommon memories,
through this circle in which we are ever at home.

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

A choice for December (for groups meeting twice in December) (5 minutes)

Explain that the single or second Circle Ministry session for December will focus on the topic, "Rituals and Traditions." If your group has chosen to meet TWICE in December, you're invited to choose a topic from among the five that you deemed the "best and most memorable" at last spring's Circle Ministry potluck gathering:

- Siblings
- Sin
- The Sacred
- How We Are Named
- Welcoming the Stranger

Consider these your "potluck 5," though we're holding you to a "single helping." Please let Jan know your choice as soon as you decide, so that she can prepare your session plan in time.

Topical Discussion (60 minutes)

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

First response

Cross-conversation

Topic: Home

I offer you Dwight Young's thoughts on home:

Home is much more than a building or a piece of ground. It's an emotion, a deep-rooted sense of welcome and permanence and belonging. It's the safe, intensely personal realm

where you can permit yourself to throw off everything that isn't fundamentally, essentially you. It's a complex, messy stew of throat-catching slants of light, kitchen smells, and déjà vu. If you're lucky and the place has been around for awhile, it can connect you—through faint pencil marks on a doorjamb or a scrap of old wallpaper in a closet—with people you never knew. Some people have a home from childhood; others spend a lifetime looking for it. Once you recognize it, you're bound to it forever—even if it sits in an extreme locale. Even if it disappears.

[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. What does “home” mean for you? Is it a place or places, present or past? Perhaps the experience and meaning of home for you is more connected with persons than with place. Or is home a state of mind, a place you can access anywhere you are, even in solitude?
2. Has the meaning, the actuality, or the experience of “home” changed for you over time? If so, how?

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, the topic will depend on whether or not you're having one or two sessions in December. The final session of this calendar year for all groups will focus on “Rituals and Traditions.”

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

Closing (1 minute)

In the words of our New England poet, the late Robert Frost:

“Home is the place where, when you have to go there,

They have to take you in.”

“I should have called it Something you somehow haven't to deserve.”

Go in love.

Go in peace.

Go home....

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!