

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network
Hospitality & Cultivating Welcome
First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA February 2026

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

“We light this chalice to find inner peace, love for each other, and faith in ourselves. Also, to be welcoming to whomever we meet and kind to all living creatures. So gather around this light of hope as we share this time together.” – *Oberlin UU Fellowship*

Check-in/Sharing: Let’s each take a couple of minutes to check in with how we are feeling and anything we would like to share. First season talking points, including Covenant. Group read aloud “I will Listen”.

Topic: Hospitality & Cultivating Welcome

At a basic level, hospitality requires that we offer food, shelter, and safety to guests. But hospitality is more than just accommodating guests. It involves creating an atmosphere of care and warmth. Intentional welcoming of strangers goes a step further, encouraging us to reach out beyond our immediate circles, creating safe and inviting spaces that facilitate connection, interaction, and a sense of belonging. In a world that often feels rushed and impersonal, a welcoming place becomes a haven—a place where people can pause and breathe. And when people feel seen and heard, they feel welcome.

We each come from different experiences, identities and needs. When we are in a position of power or privilege in a situation, we may offer a welcome we think others need, which might not match what they feel they need. We may struggle with subconscious assumptions about people according to gender, race, culture, class, neurodiversity, physical abilities or other stereotypes. How can we become more aware of our assumptions and more sensitive to the needs of others?

How do we authentically welcome people such that they feel they belong?

“True Hospitality is welcoming the stranger on (their) own terms. This kind of hospitality can only be offered by those who’ve found the center of their lives in their own hearts.” – *Henri Nouwen*

“We can do much to help our communities loosen their boundaries and begin to welcome a multitude of ways of being to make sure that individuals of mixed race, religion, or ethnicities don't feel the need to choose one or the other but see their layers as a gift, something that adds beauty.” — *Maya Soetoro-Ng*

“Poverty provides a deeper motivation for understanding your neighbors, welcoming others and attending to those who are suffering. I would go so far as to say that poverty helps you understand what happiness is, what serenity is in life.” – *Piero Gheddo*

Possible Questions for Discussion

- How have you created, cultivated, or sustained a culture of welcome? What messages have you tried to convey? What ways have you found to help others feel connected?
- What messages of welcome have you received from others? What approaches have made you feel included and welcomed, or alternatively, put off, excluded, or unwelcome?
- Have you ever wished you had understood better what welcome someone else needed and become more aware of your assumptions about their needs? Are there ways you wish others better met your needs for inclusion?
- How do you balance listening to someone with your desire to offer advice to them or to share your own similar experiences?
- Could you share ways that a community has encouraged you to move beyond an initial welcome to a deeper sense of connection and belonging?

(Group will take a few minutes to consider topic and questions and then share, ensuring each person has a turn before sharing again).

Closing Words

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." – *Hebrews 13:2*