

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Circle Ministry Session Plan Early December, 2008

How we are named

Rev. Jan Carlsson-Bull for Circle Ministry at First Parish UU Cohasset, MA
Group led by Susan Etkind & Polly Cowen

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

Gathering, Welcoming (2 minutes)

Chalice lighting & Opening words (1 minute)

“Hello, I’m...” I say, not knowing what else to say.
“I don’t know you yet,” I say to myself.
“I know your name already, and you know mine,” I say to myself.
“What is your name?” I ask, stumbling in a language still foreign to me,
after posing what I hope was a simple, “Hello, my name is...”

Moses had a conversation with God,
not quite typical, not exactly casual.
We think it was God, at least,
speaking out of a bush that burned but didn’t burn up.
No, it wasn’t exactly casual.

The voice asked Moses to free his people from their oppressors.
“Who, me?” said Moses.
“But I’ll be with you,” said God [in paraphrase].
Stalling for time, Moses said, “*If I come to the people of Israel and say to them,
‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me,
‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?*”
God said to Moses, *‘I AM WHO I AM.’*
And he said, *‘Say this to the people of Israel,
‘I AM has sent me to you.’”*

I AM had more to say, but this will suffice
to remind us that there’s something in a name.
something in a name.

Jan Carlsson-Bull, with help from Exodus 3

Check-in/Sharing (2-3 minutes@ - 20-30 minutes)

Topical Discussion (60 minutes)

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

First response

Cross-conversation

Topic: How are we called—by name?

Who we are becomes bound with how we are called, how we are called by name. There is a biblical notion that our name holds our essence. For those of us who have known more than one name, we learn a form of identity resilience. Our names are both personal and public. They hold memory; they hold possibility. Sometimes they are of our own choosing. Most often, they

have been chosen by someone else, our parents, or added on through marriage, or, even edited or changed altogether by us.

Take a moment of silence and consider these questions.

Who are you?

What story does your name hold?

How do you feel about your name?

How do you like to be called?

What does it mean for you to say: "I am.....?"

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 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

From Margaret Wheatley, in her introduction to *turning to one another: simple conversations to restore hope to the future*:

"I believe we can change the world if we start listening to one another again. Simple, honest, human conversation. Not mediation, negotiation, problem-solving, debate, or public meetings. Simple, truthful conversation where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well.

What would it feel like to be listening to each other again about what disturbs and troubles us? About what gives us energy and hope? About our yearnings, our fears, our prayers, our children?....

Human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change—personal change, community and organizational change, planetary change. If we can sit together and talk about what's important to us, we begin to come alive. We share what we see, what we feel, and we listen to what others see and feel....

I hope we can reclaim conversation as our route back to each other, and as the path forward to a hopeful future. It only requires imagination and courage and faith. These are qualities possessed by everyone. Now is the time to exercise them to their fullest."

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!