

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY Plan for Facilitators

Identity

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, October 2004
Related to Sermon Series on Knowing Who You Are

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting: From Charles Stephen Jr. (UU minister)

“I wish for you the thrill of knowing who you are, where you stand, and why. Especially why.”

Reflection/Personal Sharing/Prayer (approximately 30 minutes)

(The facilitator should briefly remind the group of confidentiality/anonymity, that this is not the time for cross conversation, etc.)

Focus Readings: From David Rankin (retired UU minister)

"I felt sorry for Jake. We were friends in seminary—many years ago. He was now a broken soul. When he was a college student, he was into existentialism—Camus, Sartre, and Kierkegaard. When he was a graduate student, he was into world religions—Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. When he was a theological student, he was into the new psychology—Fromm, Rogers, and Maslow. When he was a minister, he was into experimental worship—guitars, folk-songs, and dialogue. When he was a community organizer, he was into direct action—marches, sit-ins, and rallies. When he was a welfare recipient, he was into human potential—EST, Rolfing, and holistic medicine. Jake had discovered all kinds of things—but never the center of himself. He could not dance in the empty spaces, or listen to the sound of no birds singing."

From Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley (UU minister serving in Florida)

“The question of how identity is formed and shaped over time is a curious one. Social scientists tell us that certain aspects of our identity are prescribed at birth. Or in the words of Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker: ‘we receive who we are before we choose who we will become.’ Throughout our lives, our identity continues to change. Increasingly, self-identity includes multiple dimensions. I call this ‘the multi-multi self.’ Even at age 50 or 60, some of us are claiming parts of ourselves not yet fully explored, and new identities emerge.

Identity is not always a choice. Sometimes it is imposed by an outside power—by a parent, a colonizing force or cultural pressures....

In thinking about identity, here are some questions to consider. If you were to draw a pie chart of your various identities, which dimension (or dimensions) would take up the largest portion? Would it be gender or race? Sexuality or nationality? Occupation or a particular role you play? It might be...abilities.... Unitarian Universalism....

‘All people’ says psychologist Naim Akbar ‘have a major task, from cradle to grave, of defining who they are.’ Spiritual wholeness comes from finding meaning in life—which begins with knowing who you are.”

Focus Questions:

What are some of your identities?

How do they fit together? Are some more important than others? Why? Are some in conflict?

Which come from roles, birth, which are chosen? Which do you want to keep, diminish, explore?

What values do you experience from knowing who you are?

What disadvantages come with a sense of identity?

What do you experience as your center? Is there a part you would describe as spiritual? How would you describe it?

Checkout/Likes and Wishes

(This is the time for facilitators to ask participants what they liked about this meeting and what they might wish for future meetings. This is also the time for any discussion of logistics.)

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice: From Robert Weston (UU minister)

“This day and this moment knowing myself / One with all being, / I would be silent and let infinity speak through me / To create in myself a greater patience / And passion / For our still unknown and undetermined ends.”