

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Circle Ministry 2009-2010
Love's Edge

*Adapted from the session plan of Bob Zee, First Unitarian Society in Newton, MA
Rev. Jan Carlsson-Bull for Circle Ministry at First Parish UU Cohasset, MA*

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

Gathering, Welcoming (2 minutes)

Chalice lighting & Opening words (1 minute)

She loves me, she loves me not;

He loves me, he loves me not.

A guessing game, but it need not be,
if we hold each other in the light of this flame.

If we look more intently than we care about being seen,
if we listen more deeply than we care about being heard.
we will be seen,
we will be heard.
we will be loved.
We will be we—
with open hearts, open minds,
in a circle of soul.

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

Service ventures (10 minutes)

If you haven't already begun to do so, explore what your group's focus will be for a service venture benefitting this congregation and a service venture benefitting our larger community.

Topical Discussion (60 minutes)

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

First response

Cross-conversation

Topic: Love's Edge

Love isn't a smooth surface. Most of us know this. Most of us have stumbled, tripped, hoped and hurt our way across love's perilous odysseys. Love is not for the faint of heart. The more our hearts open, the more vulnerable we are to love's surprises, the more liable we are to fall off love's edge, edgy as love is. So it happens with romantic love, love for a child, love among nations, love in communities, love in groups affirming it as the foundation on which we walk together. So it happens.

Rebecca Parker, Unitarian Universalist theologian and President of Starr King School for the Ministry, a UU seminary, has this to say about the matter:

“It is when we are joined most closely, walking on the beach in the summer sun or reading on the porch in the autumn, preparing a meal in the kitchen on a winter afternoon, or in the garden on spring mornings turning the earth together. In just these moments of intense connection and joy and love, I can not help but feel a twinge of apprehension and pain

known that some uncalled for interruption, some small disagreement, a little accident of fate will pull us part. They are so close, so intertwined these experiences of joy and sorrow, of love and pain.

And similarly, no matter the petulance, the storms of anger, the harsh silence that can fall between us, I am in some part of my being buoyed up, even cheered by the knowledge that smiles and the sly touch of love will soon come, inescapable and certain, blinding and overwhelming in its power.”

[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.]

1. Tell a story of how you have experienced the rough sides of love, taken that leap making yourself vulnerable and known the pain of love.
2. As Rebecca Parker points out, joy and sorrow, love and pain, breaks and repairs are the natural rhythm in all intimate relationships. What have you learned over the years about these rhythms of intimacy, and how have you developed tools to cope?

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, we’ll consider the topic, “How We’re Called.”

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

Closing (1 minute)

In the words of St. Paul to the rowdy church at Corinth:

“Love bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.”

What Paul did not say:

“Are we amazed at our readiness to still throw ourselves into it?”

Go—open to the wild, unpredictable, and grace-filled adventure that is love.

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!