



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network

MODERN DAY SABBATH: Session Plan

Small Group Conversations, Anne Bailey coordinator

smallgroups@westhartforduu.org

Universalist Church of West Hartford, CT

(TOPIC READINGS start on p. 4)

OUR SMALL GROUP MISSION

These Small Group conversations are offered as a way to get to know each other better, as we explore the various topics selected by our Small Group Team, related to our life experiences, questions, joys, and challenges. We are free to share our thoughts and feelings, joys and struggles, as we choose, and are here to listen to and care about each other. (We are NOT here to be a therapy group ~ or to tackle “church politics”!)

We look forward to building closer connections with each other, as we spend this time together, and form new or deeper friendships and build our sense of community.

OUR SMALL GROUP COVENANT

As members of this Small Group of the Universalist Church, we covenant with each other to help make this experience both personally and spiritually rewarding, to nourish our sense of community, and to learn and practice right relationship.

We will try to arrive before the beginning of each session so that it can start on time. We will try to attend all of the meetings of our group unless we are ill or away, and will let the group know in advance when that will occur or by contacting the facilitator:

Facilitator Contact information:

We use these guidelines for sharing, as a pathway to a caring community:

- We will deeply listen and ask honest and open questions.
- We will respect confidentiality. What is said here stays here, unless we agree to share something outside of our group.
- We will allow others to speak without interruption.
- We will not try to fix, save, advise or correct.
- We will honor time for reflection and quietness and respect a member’s right to remain silent, as they choose.
- We will treat others with respect and without judgment.
- We will honor the diversity of thought and feeling and values among us.

CHECK IN

Check-in is a time to deepen our connections with each other by sharing joys, sorrows, challenges, and changes in our lives. Sharing is not required. Only share if you are comfortable. What is shared in group is confidential.

Connection is the energy created between people when they feel seen, heard, valued and understood. One of the goals of small group is to move out of our heads and into our hearts in order to deepen our connections with one other.

Authentic sharing from a place of honesty and vulnerability allows us to build a community of trust, caring, and belonging. The connections we build with one another become contagious. They grow and spread and infuse our larger church community with life and vitality.

1. WELCOME / INTRODUCTIONS :

Let's remember to **Silence cell phones! Speak up clearly, so all can hear.**

Remind folks to let us know and to remind us if they have a hearing issue or if we aren't speaking up enough, so we can be aware.

• At FIRST SESSION of the series: Let's introduce ourselves:

"Tell us a bit about yourself, for example:"

- Your name, where you live and how long you've been in this area
- How long have you been a UU, coming to our church
- Your family, what you do (or did) for work, any special passions or hobbies
(Model this by starting with yourself.)

Distribute MISSION/COVENANT/CHECK IN handout.

- Read the MISSION statement orally - volunteers read COVENANT
- Remind folks to contact the facilitator if you are unable to come to a session (if not included, give them your contact info. to add to their copy)
- Read the CHECK-IN orally, in turn.
- "Since time has been spent on introductions today (tonight), we'll keep our check-in short"; ex. "Might you have a joy or feeling of gratitude you can share with us?"

2. CHECK IN: (at 2nd and later sessions: repeat names again, if needed, and read the following aloud, as you choose):

Check-in is a time to deepen our connections with each other by sharing joys, sorrows, challenges, and changes in our lives. Sharing is not required. Only share if you are comfortable. What is shared in group is confidential.

Some CHECK-IN PROMPTS:

- *How have these past couple of weeks gone for you?*
- *Can you share some of your 'highs' and/or 'lows'?*
- *Has anything brought you a sense of gratitude or accomplishment? - of joy - or sorrow?*

3. OPENING: Use "chime" or bell to quiet folks; LIGHT CANDLE:

(3 reading choices below, you might vary this from session to session)

- *May "our separate fires kindle one flame" as we gather in this circle—bringing our stories, our reflections, our hopes and our struggles.*

May our candle flame lend light and promise for our time together.

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- *May we know once again that we are not isolated beings, but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe, to this community and to each other.*

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- *May our time together bring learning, understanding, compassion, encouragement, and hope as we share about our life journeys and passions.*

4. CENTERING: *In preparation for our conversation, let's take a few moments to center ourselves and be thankful for this time we have together in community.*

Please get comfortable, place both feet solidly on the floor, rest your hands on your thighs and let your shoulders drop. Gently close your eyes or focus on a spot a few feet in front of you on the floor. Bring your attention to the flow of your breath.

*Breathing in I calm my body.
Breathing out I smile.*

*Dwelling in this present moment,
I know this is a wonderful moment.*

Our life's path is not one we travel alone. We are in it together, and the company of spiritual friends helps us feel our interconnectedness.

Ring the chime: *"Slowly open your eyes."*

5. DISTRIBUTE READING:

Ask for **volunteers** to **read the paragraphs aloud, in turn.** You might include a **pause after the reading,** to allow time to reflect before responding.

6. POSE QUESTIONS to prompt sharing, invite folks to respond if and as they choose; If you choose, you can **split readings into sections,** with questions/conversation as you go along (some readings are already done this way).

Encourage silent spaces between reflections; be comfortable with silence.

You might prompt: **"Take some time to think about that."** - or the like.

FEEL FREE TO ADJUST or ADAPT THE QUESTIONS PROVIDED

You may not get to all of them, or you may want to modify them slightly or skip around a bit, even make up a new question, depending on what comes up in the conversation, to keep it moving along.

KEEPING YOUR GROUP ON TRACK: If a group member should go on and on, or responds inappropriately so that **conversation needs redirection,** gently ask that they give others an opportunity to share or say something like:

- **"Let's reconsider the question"**
- **"Let's stop now and take a moment to reflect."**
- **"Thank you for sharing your thoughts. Now let's move on"**.

You can also make reference to the covenant.

(If you are co-facilitating, work out a collaboration system with your partner, such as: when the other is facilitating, feel free to help guide the conversation, step in if you see a need to redirect.)

If the conversation has slowed down, you as facilitator can model responses to help the conversation along. **Some prompts could be:**

- **What are your thoughts about that?**
- **How does it make you feel?**
- **Can you say more about that?**
- **What does it make you think of?**

If the topic is really not going well, turn it back to the group:

- **"What do you want to do with this topic?"**

TOPIC READINGS start on next page:

TAKING A MODERN-DAY SABBATH

The importance of setting aside time to slow down and unplug.

As a child, my family didn't specifically observe the Sabbath. Nonetheless, Sundays were clearly different than the rest of the week. The day was slower, quieter, calmer. The day was sacred, with a cadence and rhythm all its own.

Yet somewhere and somehow, things changed. Weekends became about chores and errands, laundry and grocery shopping, emails and work projects. Sunday became just another workday, exacerbated by an addiction to technology and social media. Sundays—and by extension, the entire week—seemed to lose their serenity and healing quality, and as a result, I lost a sense of connection to family, to self and to God.

A few months ago, I realized that I had a deep longing to create a sacred temporal space; a few hours or even a whole day when time could move at its own pace and I could escape the noise, the obligations and self-imposed anxieties, the constant comparisons and one-upmanship and the pressures to do and achieve and obtain. So, for the past several months, I have observed my own modern-day Sabbath. Unlike the traditional Christian Sabbath or Jewish Shabbat, there are no hard and fast rules. Rather, the modern-day Sabbath is more personal and intentional. The modern Sabbath is about delegating a time to focus on what I have instead of searching for something new, a time to disconnect from work and technology in order to reconnect with family and friends and self, a time to quiet the external noise so I can hear my own powerful internal voice.

The modern Sabbath is an intentional effort to “turn off and tune in.” As a result, the modern-day Sabbath is also more personal than the traditional Sabbath. For me, the Sabbath means that I do not email, text, surf the web, turn on the computer, work, shop (including grocery shopping), do chores or watch television (although getting my husband and kids to forego television is a work in progress).

Instead, my personal Sabbath day includes rest, music, church, exercise, time outdoors, prayer or meditation, personal writing, time alone, sitting still, reading and focused time with family.

One of the most challenging parts of observing the Sabbath in today's day and age is overcoming a dependence on instant gratification and distraction. The Internet makes it possible for us to feed most of our wants and needs now—whether looking for a recipe, buying a new swimsuit, or checking the weather. Technology has also made it easier than ever to numb our emotions and distract us from anxieties. Social media—Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest—television, 24 hours “news” coverage, and blogs all give us an easy outlet for distraction so we don't have to endure discomfort, whether within ourselves or amongst others.

By removing the distractions one day each week, I am slowly learning to become comfortable with my own discomfort. A constant reliance on technology to do everything right now has the potential to feed our impatience and self-importance. By unplugging for one day each week, my modern-day, personal Sabbath seeks to balance the utility of technology with a little patience and remind myself that life unfolds on a timetable that is not always within my control. By removing the distractions one day each week, I am slowly learning to become comfortable with my own discomfort in order to gain a certain depth of self-awareness and figure out how to work through, not around, problems.

With a mantra of “turning off to tune in,” the modern Sabbath almost feels like capturing time in a bottle. Time is a funny thing, you know. On some days, it seems to slog along, and then, in the blink of an eye, a month or a year or a decade has passed and we are reeling from the loss of our Earthly time. By separating one day from the frenzied blur of the remaining six, by disconnecting from the frenetic pace of technology to reconnect with the sacredly simple, the modern-day Sabbath allows us to slow time and savor its goodness. Because nestled into that little nugget of slowed time is a heady calm and a mild exhilaration in the stillness and the quiet and the waiting. ~ *By Christine Organ*

QUESTIONS:

- Which of the author’s comments hits home with you?
- How do you react to this idea? Would you find it do-able?
- Are there ways you might build mini-Sabbaths into your daily life?
- What would you choose to do in your “Sabbath” times?

READING: *by Chaplain Bob, at Seabury in Bloomfield, CT*

I recently returned from a delightful, sunny week at Cape Cod. When I am on vacation, I feel whole and wholly myself; I am especially kind to strangers; I am thankful and relaxed.

So here’s my challenge to myself: Regardless of my daily tasks and duties, I am trying to maintain the mind and heart of vacation now that I am back to what we normally call work.. That is, I am trying to approach each day with gratitude, kindness, wholeness-of-self, wonder, meaning, equanimity, and an awareness of the fullness of life.

QUESTIONS:

- In what ways do you feel different when you are on vacation? In what ways is your behavior different?
- Does time take on a different quality: does it seem to slow down, are days more distinct, one from another - or do the days seem to fly faster? Is this dependent on what you are doing (being lazy vs. traveling, of example)? Why do you think that is?
- Can you think of ways you might pretend you are “on vacation” in the midst of your busy life?
- What might they be? What feelings would you like to capture?
- What other thoughts do these readings bring forth for you?

As CONVERSATION comes to an end, you might ask for **last thoughts on the topic:**

“Do you have a thought from this conversation that you will carry home with you?”

CLOSING: Ask volunteer who brought a Closing, to read it to the group.

RING CHIME and EXTINGUISH CANDLE (Choose one of these or one of your choice)

As our time together comes to a close, we give thanks for one another, for the chance to share our lives, and to renew our spirits in the company of friends. May we go forth enriched by our gathering, committed to living life fully, to loving life with more passion, and to supporting one another.

OR

Remembering that the universe is so much larger than our ability to comprehend, let us go forth from this time together with the resolve to stop trying to reduce the incomprehensible to our own petty expectations, so that wonder -- that sense of what is sacred -- can find space to open up our minds and illumine our lives.

OR

May we value our shared reflections and take away new understandings of ourselves, each other, and our being together. Thank you for sharing your story. Thank you for creating a place of safety. Thank you for listening with appreciation.

ANNOUNCE NEXT SESSION'S TOPIC: (unless last session)

Ask for a volunteer to bring in a CLOSING reading (if needed) for this next session (It can be something they particularly like, doesn't necessarily have to relate to the topic.)

if providing SNACKS, ask for a volunteer