

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY Plan for Facilitators

Making Connections

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, September 2007

Thanks to Jan Locher, UU Congregation of Iowa City, Iowa who created much of this session.

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

From Rev. John Buehrens, UUA president 1993-2001:

To be human is to be religious. To be religious is to make connections. To lead a meaningful life among the many competing forces of the 21st century, each of us need support in making meaningful re-connection to the best of our global heritage, the best in each other and the best in ourselves.

Check-in:

What is most on your mind today? Share one high and one low from your life right now.

Focus Reading:

Words from John Buehrens in A Chosen Faith:

We Unitarian Universalist have always united more on the basis of what Channing called “practical religion” rather than we have on any particular metaphysic or doctrine. By practical we mean supporting one another in our spiritual and ethical living, attempting to bear witness to our highest values in our everyday lives, and in that way having an influence on community life.

Focus Questions:

In what practical ways does your membership in this community support your spiritual and ethical living?

When have you felt deeply connected to a person, a group or a place?

How did that happen? Are there common themes among your answers today?

How do you seek connections as part of our UU community?

What hinders your ability to make new connections?

What one thing could you practically do to make a new connection here?

Checkout/Likes and Wishes:

Did this session meet your needs for connection and spiritual growth? Was our covenant honored?

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

Sometimes our light goes out but is blown into flame by an encounter with another human being. Each of us owes the deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this inner light.---Dr. Albert Schweitzer, member, Church of the Larger Fellowship, Unitarian Universalist

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Maintaining Connections
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA
Created by Susan Hollister, Beth Tiewater and Lucy Carroll, November 2006

Chalice Lighting and Song: (repeat 3 times and/or sing as a round)

Make new friends but keep the old,
One is silver and the other gold.

Opening Words:

“Some friendships die on their own, of simple inanition, having been quietly allowed to lapse by the unacknowledged agreement of both parties. Others break down because time has altered old friends, given them different interests, values, points of view. In still others, only one party works at the friendship, while the other belongs to what Truman Capote called “some odd psychological type...that only writes when he is written to.” And then of course there are the friendships that end when one friend betrays or is felt to betray the other, or fails to come through in a crisis, or finds himself violently disputing the other on matters of profoundest principle.” from *Friendship Among the Intellectuals* by Joseph Epstein

Welcome by Naomi Shihad Nye
The Arabs used to say,
When a stranger appears at your door,
feed him for three days
before asking who he is,
where he's come from,
where he's headed.
That way, he'll have strength enough
to answer.
Or, by then you'll be such good friends
you don't care.

Let's go back to that.
Rice? Pine nuts?
Here, take the red brocade pillow.
My child will serve water
to your horse.

No, I was not busy when you came!
I was not preparing to be busy.
That's the armor everyone put on
at the end of the century
to pretend they had a purpose
in the world.

I refuse to be claimed.
Your plate is waiting.
We will snip fresh mint
into your tea.

“The only way to have a friend is to be one.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

Check-in: *What is most on your mind today? Share one high and one low from your life right now.*

Focus Reading:

Simple Song by Marge Piercy

When we are going toward someone we say
you are just like me
your thoughts are my brothers
word matches word
how easy to be together.

When we are leaving someone we say
how strange you are
we cannot communicate
we can never agree
How hard, hard and weary to be together.

We are not different nor alike
but each strange in his leather body
sealed in skin and reaching out clumsy hand
and loving is an act
that cannot outlive
the open hand
the open eye
the door in the chest standing open.

Sitting in Silence: Take some time now to think of a special friend and what made that friendship special.

Focus Questions:

What makes the friendship you've just thought about special? What have you learned from each other? How has the friendship changed over time?

Think about someone who is not your friend, someone with whom you have had a difficult relationship. Remember the words in the UU Principles about "inherent worth and dignity of every person," "compassion in human relations," and "acceptance of one another." What do these Principles mean in relation to people like your current "non-friend?"

Friendship takes care and maintenance. What do you do to maintain connections? Repair breaches? Deepen bonds? What do you wish you did?

Checkout/Likes and Wishes: *Did this session meet your needs for connection and spiritual growth? Was our covenant honored?*

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

"Friendship is the joy, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but pouring all right out as they are, chaff and grain together, confident that a faithful, friendly hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and with a breath of comfort, blow the rest away."

from *Middlemarch* by George Eliot