

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
Circle Ministry 2008-2009

*Memory: The Glue That Holds Us Together*

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)**

[Light chalice]

In the flame of a candle, in the flame of this chalice,  
we grow reflective.

We are drawn by this fragile flame  
into a circle of wondering and imagining.

We are drawn by this singular taper  
into stories told at ancient campfires.

We are drawn by this amber glow  
into amber memories.

We are drawn by this chalice  
into the circle of one another.

Let go of all that is unfinished elsewhere.

Let go of all that is unresolved elsewhere.

Let go of all that is unsolved elsewhere.

Be here and now together.

in this ministry of a circle

around another ancient campfire.

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

**Topical Discussion (60 minutes)**

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

First response

Cross-conversation

**Topic: Memory: The Glue That Holds Us Together**

She turned her head away from her companion and we locked stares, as she stood on the steps of the church. Not quite recognizing me, she lingered unsure of herself. I had perhaps changed more than she, but I shouted her name as soon as I saw her. I couldn't believe it was her. She hesitated, not yet making the connection, not yet ingesting my face. It had been many years. Then she too let out a shout of recognition. Our paths had intersected and meshed so long ago, as if it were another life. Yet here she was on this glorious Sunday morning, standing on the steps of the church as I greeted her and memory took hold of both of us. "We hold each other's history," she said later that night over dinner with our spouses, both of them new since our last meeting. "We hold each other's history."

Switch frames. You're climbing up into the steeple's underbelly, and then you spot them. Initials carved into the centuries-old wood. Years ago the youth of the parish had found this space, a hide-out whose other surface stretched skyward. "We want to be remembered," they

had said without saying. Out came the pocket knives. The engraving began. “We will be remembered,” they said silently, leaving their initials far behind.

History is shaped and held in so many ways that mark the heart. We hold each other’s history in memories. Not all are pleasant. Not all make it through the gates of consciousness. Then there are those of which we speak to an old friend or those of which we speak to a gathered family or those which we hold up to a gathered community on a celebrated anniversary, always beginning with the words: “Remember when.....”

What we say may or may not be what happened, but it is remembered truth, with the power to shape the course of what is to come, in an evening or an era.

[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.]

**NOTE:** As discussion begins, encourage participants to pause after each speaker registers their initial thoughts, so that we can all digest the words of each.

1. Think of an old friend to whom you could readily say, “We hold each other’s history.” Tell a story of a memory you share and how that memory helps to seal your bond with this person.
2. Where do you feel most at home? Share an experience that you have known there that perhaps more than any other tells you that this is where your heart is.

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 and final session of this Circle Ministry year, we’ll consider the topic you have chosen for this group’s “Unfinished Business.”

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

### **Closing (1 minute)**

Go with the gift of memories awakened in our time together.

Go with the gift of memories shaped in our time together.

Go with anticipation for what is yet to be.

Go in love. Go in hope. Go in peace.

## 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!**