

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Small Group Ministry

Mindfulness

First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA, April 2019

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

“Each place is the right place--the place where I now am can be a sacred space.” — *Ravi Ravindra*

Check-in/Sharing: This is the time to mention briefly any major issues or events on your mind that you would like to share. Time for our initial brainstorming on community service options.

Topic: Mindfulness

Life can quickly pass us by when we're not focused on what matters. Many of us have a habit of emphasizing the negative and overlooking the positive. Being mindful can help.

Mindfulness is a state of active, open attention on the present. It means noticing what is happening in your mind and in your body. It means being aware of what is happening around you. When you are mindful, you carefully observe your thoughts and feelings without judging them. Your feelings aren't good or bad - they just are.

Mindfulness is about observing. You notice your life with a little distance, instead of reacting emotionally. The opposite of mindfulness is being on autopilot, when you do things without any thought or consideration. Mindfulness means living in the moment and being aware of your current experience, rather than dwelling on the past or anticipating the future.

“Our minds are like crows. They pick up everything that glitters, no matter how uncomfortable our nests get with all that metal in them.” — *Thomas Merton*

“I am learning slowly to bring my crazy pinball-machine mind back to this place of friendly detachment toward myself, so I can look out at the world and see all those other things with respect. Try looking at your mind as a wayward puppy that you are trying to paper train. You don't drop kick a puppy into the neighbor's yard every time it piddles on the floor. You just keep bringing it back to the newspaper. So I keep trying gently to bring my mind back to what is really there to be seen, maybe to be seen and noted with a kind of reverence.” — *Anne Lamott*

“We use mindfulness to observe the way we cling to pleasant experiences and push away unpleasant ones.” — *Sharon Salzberg*

“Mindfulness is simply being aware of what is happening right now without wishing it were different; enjoying the pleasant without holding on when it changes (which it will); being with the unpleasant without fearing it will always be this way (which it won't).” — *James Baraz*

“Sometimes you need to sit lonely on the floor in a quiet room in order to hear your own voice and not let it drown in the noise of others.” — *Charlotte Eriksson*

“When you reach a calm and quiet meditative state, that is when you can hear the sound of silence.” — *Stephen Richards*

“Do not ruin today with mourning tomorrow.” — *Catherynne M. Valente*

“You can destroy your now by worrying about tomorrow.” — *Janis Joplin*

“Be happy in the moment, that’s enough. Each moment is all we need, not more.” – *Mother Teresa*

Let’s engage in a brief mindfulness exercise – a simple five-minute breathing mediation.

(Facilitator: please read the following words.)

First, choose a relaxed and comfortable position.

Close your eyes if you wish and relax your body. Notice how your body feels where you are; take a moment to notice any external distractions, like background sounds or the temperature of the room.

Then become aware of your breath and notice the sensation of your breath going in and out. Pay attention to the sensations of your breath, one at a time – when one ends, another begins. Your mind is likely to start flitting from one thought to another. Whenever you notice that your mind has wandered, just gently bring your attention back to the feeling of your breath going in and out. Keep focusing on your breath, in silence.

(Facilitator will time 5 minutes, then read the following words.)

Once again take note of your whole body and the sensations you are feeling.

Then come back to the group.

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- How has practicing mindfulness been valuable in your life? Or how might it be valuable?
- Can you share stories about when focusing on the future instead of the present either helped or hindered you?
- What habits do you bring to thinking about the past? Please describe examples of times when you thought about the past in ways that weren’t helpful or ways that were helpful.
- Could you share any situations in which you remember feeling fully present in the moment?
- Are there specific times that you regret not being more present? What prevented you?
- What helps you to turn off background noise in your mind? What have you tried that has worked and what has not worked?
- What techniques do you use to focus your attention on the present moment?

(Group will take a few minutes to consider topic and questions and then share).

Wrapping Up: How did you like this topic and session?

Closing Words

“Don’t just do something, sit there.” – *Buddhist teacher Sylvia Boorstein*