

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

Mothers

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)

Gathered here, we are for a time, child-like with each other,
still hoping for what was never given, never will be,
still hurting from what was given, with traces indelible.

Gathering in this circle, we are for a time, parent-like for each other,
sometimes providing unwittingly what was never given and now can be,
sometimes relieving without knowing it the hurts of soul and psyche,
those hurts that threatened never to disappear.

And then, and now
come second chances, third chances,
to remold nature,
to infuse nurture with the deepest of listening.

Here and now arrives the never imagined chance that each of us might be heard,
thankful beyond our wildest dreams that it's happening.

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

Discussion of congregational and community service plans (10-20 minutes)

Topical Discussion (60 minutes)

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

First response

Cross-conversation

Topic: Mothers

Mothers come in countless forms and ages and times. Some are Moms and Mommies. Some are aunts. Some are sisters. Some are grandmothers, even great-grandmothers. Some are single; some are married; some are married to other Mothers. Mothers don't have to give birth to you to love you. Like the woman Kay Frazier recalls—her great-grandmother to be exact.

“I was fortunate enough to live with my great-grandmother
for the first four years of my life,” she writes.

“One of my favorite pictures of her was taken outside,
with my brother sitting on one side of her and me on the other.
I'm holding onto her skirts and looking out, seeing what there is to explore out there.

Under her tutelage, I climbed to the top of the kitchen cabinets,
frightening my mother out of her wits, but avoiding any harm to myself.

I followed the dog into the woods—and safely back out.

Where my mother feared, my great-grandmother had tired of fear
and decided she was through with it at her advanced age.

For various reasons, I was very troubled and confused as a young adult in college.
One night, I dreamed it was the year 1890 and I was twenty-five,

the same age as my great-grandmother.
 She let me rest inside her mind as she danced and laughed and rejoiced in life.
 The next day, I was calm, as if the storm had passed,
 leaving me weaker but still standing.
 I'm still not quite sure if it was really a dream
 or if she came back one last time to help."

(from Kay Frazier, "Angels in Small Places,"
 in *How We Are Called: A Meditation Anthology*, Skinner House Books, Boston, 2003)

The memories rise up like dreams—good dreams, not so good dreams, nightmares, day dreams—all drifting in a collage titled "Mother." How were we mothered? How do we mother—men and women alike?

[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.]

Take a moment of silence and consider these questions.

1. Through a story, introduce your Mother—stepmother, birth mother, grandmother, one of many mothers, it doesn't matter. Tell a story that says: "This is my Mother."
2. Give an example of how you carry your Mother with you—perhaps in your values or your talents or your voice or your dreams or your fears or even your own parenting.

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, "Day Dreams."

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

Closing (1 minute)

Let it sift, the stuff of our time together.
 Go with an open mind and an open heart.

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!