



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network

OUR NEED FOR A TRIBE session plan

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(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?"**

OUR NEED for a “TRIBE”

We have a strong instinct to belong to small groups defined by clear purpose and understanding — “tribes.” This tribal connection has been largely lost in modern society, but regaining it may be the key to our psychological survival.

Decades before the American Revolution, Benjamin Franklin lamented that a significant number of English frontier settlers were constantly running off to join indigenous communities, but Indians weren’t finding Western society attractive enough to cross the culture line in the opposite direction. Several facets of tribal life may have been crucial to its appeal back then, including its egalitarianism and the autonomy it offered the individual.

Tribal society has been exerting an almost gravitational pull on Westerners for hundreds of years, and the reason lies deep in our evolutionary past as a communal species. The most recent example of that attraction is combat veterans who come home to find themselves missing the incredibly intimate bonds of platoon life, with the loyalty and selflessness demanded.

Soldiers who have learned to put comrades and country above themselves return to a fractured, hyper-individualistic society that has little use for tribal values - one that is “a formula for deep despair”. Re-entering a society that expects selfish ambition and often provides a veteran no useful work is “often a devastating transition”. Feeling needed and trusted can be “utterly intoxicating” and the loss of closeness that comes at the end of deployment may explain the high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by military veterans today.

The irony is that for many veterans, as well as civilians, war feels better than peace, adversity can turn out to be a blessing, and disasters are sometimes remembered more fondly than weddings or tropical vacations.

~ as reported in “TRIBE: On Homecoming and Belonging” by Sebastian Junger

Combining history, psychology, and anthropology, this book explores what we can learn from tribal societies about loyalty, belonging, and the eternal human quest for meaning. It explains why we are stronger when we come together, and how that can be achieved even in today's divided world.

One of the most fundamental human needs is the need to belong. Noted psychologist, Abraham Maslow, identified it as one of the five basic needs. We want to be part of a group and to feel loved and accepted by others. That is, we want to be a member of a tribe. A tribe - or a pack, clan, elected family, posse, crew, network, or true friends – is a group of people who share common interests and values and show genuine appreciation and care for each other.

Your tribe members are those people who accept you just as you are, and who want the very best for you. They make you feel understood, and they encourage you to go after your goals and pursue your dreams. Also, the members of your tribe help you to get through difficult times, and they provide you with a sense of community and support.

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Sir Ken Robinson – author of “The Element,” a book on how to find work that you’re passionate about – argues that your tribe is essential in helping you to find your element. Members of a tribe kick ideas around with each other and validate each other. Also, tribe members drive each other to explore the real extent of their talents. In addition, Robinson argues that when a group of people with common interests come together, a synergy is created which allows them to create something much greater than any of them could have created individually.

The members of your tribe are your allies on your life journey. When you’re creating or expanding your tribe, look for people who will lift you up, help you grow, recharge you, inspire you, and celebrate with you, and who are willing to lend a hand when you need it. In addition, always remember that as a tribe member you have responsibilities toward your tribe. You need to give back to the tribe and offer other tribe members your support, just as they support you.

~ Marc Chernoff, *HACK LIFE* (<http://www.marcandangel.com>)

QUESTIONS:

- What thoughts come to you as you think about having or finding a “tribe”?
- What needs do you have that a ‘tribe’ could provide? What do you need to feel included?
- What makes you feel like an outsider?
- What connections did your family have that might be considered a “tribe”?
- Think of our newly-arrived refugee families - what must it be like for them to be lacking a ‘tribe’ - how might they find one?
- If you have visited other parts of this country or traveled abroad, have you noticed differences in how people fulfill their need for a “tribe” or community connection?

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.

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*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.*

**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**

**Additional reading to take home:**

**Finding Your Tribe**

Your Allies On Life's Journey by Madisyn Taylor

*We all desire to find our tribe, a community of those that feel comfortable to us and nurture our journey.*

Part of being human is the search for an individual identity. Bound to this strong need to establish a unique persona, however, is an equally intense desire for acceptance. It is when we find our individual tribes that both are satisfied. Our tribe members are those people who accept us as we are without reservation and gladly accompany us on our journeys of evolution. Among them, we feel free to be our imperfect selves, to engage unabashedly in the activities we enjoy, and to express our vulnerabilities by relying on our tribe for support. We feel comfortable investing our time and energy in the members of our tribe, and are equally comfortable allowing them to invest their resources in our development.

The individuals who eventually become members of your unique tribe are out there in the wide world waiting for you. You are destined to find them, one by one, as you move through life. Sometimes your own efforts will put you in contact with your future tribe members. At other times, circumstances beyond your control will play a role in helping you connect with your tribe. If you look about you and discover that you are already allied with a wonderful and supportive tribe, remember that there are likely many members of your tribe you have not yet met. On the other hand, if you feel you are still living outside of your tribe, broadening your horizons can help you find your tribe members.

However your life develops after you come together with your tribe, you can be assured that its members will stand at your side. On the surface, your tribe may seem to be nothing more than a loose-knit group of friends and acquaintances to whom you ally yourself. Yet when you look deeper, you will discover that your tribe grounds you and provides you with a sense of community that ultimately fulfills many of your most basic human needs.