

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Circle Ministry

Our Parents, Ourselves

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 (1 minute)

Opening words (1 minute)

Upon the birth of her granddaughter, poet and longtime Unitarian Universalist, Phoebe Hoss, gave her the gift of “Original Mystery.”

You, you dear few
solid pounds of bone,
muscle, luscious
rose-petal flesh; you
with your thrusting,
quivering, questing arms
and legs; you with your
wordless, watching
eyes; you—you
creature of no
knowing—are somehow, somewhere within
your being imbibing
the kaleidoscope
of ours. Somewhere
in you some pristine
core, some invisible
sponge, is soaking
up smiles, frowns, bits
and pieces of ourselves—
fragments we’ve carefully
ordered over the years, the
bright we know, the shadows
we don’t—and ordering them
anew, ordering them as
what your eyes
will see, your ears hear,
your tongue speak;
ordering them, finally,
as uniquely you.

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

Discussion (60 minutes)

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

First response

Cross-conversation

Topic: Our Parents, Ourselves

How distinct are we from our parents—the parents we know as our birth parents or perhaps the birth parents we never knew but the parents who raised us? Imagine that your parents, however you define them, received early on in your life these words of poet Khalil Gibran:

....Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
 which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them,
 but seek not to make them like you....

From a slightly different perspective, Phoebe Hoss spoke to her newly born granddaughter:

....you
creature of no
knowing—are somehow, somewhere within
your being imbibing
the kaleidoscope
of ours....

To what extent do we inherit—by nature and nurture—the traits and more of those who raised us? Are we uniquely ourselves? Are we our parents with a twist? Are we the spitting image?

Take a few moments of silence and ponder your responses to these questions:

1. What about you reflects who your parents are or were? What about you sharply contrasts with who your parents are or were?
2. Tell a story that illustrates your gratitude for a way in which you are like your parents or a way in which you are significantly different from your parents.

(Read through both 1 and 2 and choose for discussion the questions that best fit your group.)

[See Circle Ministry Session Sequence for clarification of this next segment.]

First response
Cross-conversation
Concluding statements

What concluding thoughts would you like to share?

Feedback (15 minutes)

Thank the group. Ask what they liked in this session and what variations they would hope for.

Explain that for the next session, we'll consider the topic, "Welcoming the Stranger."

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

Closing (1 minute)

As we go forth from this circle, may the stories shared remind us of the threads that connect us with each other and from generation to generation. May we spin those threads through love and wisdom into hearts and minds more open to who we are and who we can be. Amen.

Circle Ministry Session Sequence for Facilitators First Parish Unitarian Universalist – Cohasset

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!