

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
Personal Risk Taking
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, Rev. Dr. Maureen Killoran

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

- *To laugh is to risk appearing the fool,*
- *To weep is to risk appearing sentimental,*
- *To reach out for another is to risk involvement,*
- *To expose feelings is to risk exposing true self,*
- *To place your ideas, your dreams before the crowd is to risk their loss,*
- *To love is to risk not being loved in return,*
- *To live is to risk dying,*
- *To hope is to risk despair,*
- *To try is to risk failure,*
- *But risk must be taken, because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.*
- *The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, and is nothing.*
- *She may avoid suffering and sorrow, but she simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love, live.*

Chained by his certitudes, he is a slave, he has forfeited freedom. Only a person who risks - is free.
William Arthur Ward

Check in: What is most on your mind today? Share one high and one low from your life right now.

Focus Reading:

Healing Happened With a Song

It took a minute to realize what was happening. We were gathered on the dock, a disparate bunch of travelers waiting for the Aran Islands ferry. Islanders returning home, kids off for a lark, German tourists – and us, a small group of Americans on interfaith pilgrimage with their novice leader – me. Milling around, each anxious to see his or her luggage loaded onto the boat, we were each our own first priority -- until a flurry of distress cut through our preoccupation.

Halfway onto the boat was a child, maybe three years old, clinging for dear life to the gangway as it slid closer and closer to the edge of the pier. His Gran was right behind, holding white-knuckled to the rail and straining to keep the lad from falling into the cold blackness between ferry and pier. The world narrowed to the grandmother's desperation, the mother's screams, and the boatmen's curses as they fought to subdue a gangplank gone wild. And, in the crowd, panic was on the edge of being born.

In emergencies, I believe that bystanders are best advised to stay put. But this time I wasn't just a bystander. I was leading 13 pilgrims on a spiritually-focused journey in a foreign land. What does a leader "do" when the appropriate thing is to stand and wait?

We'd sung a lot during our journey, meditative songs, giving voice to interfaith prayer. Now, I'm no musician. I can't stay on key. During my youth, harsh teasing taught me to keep my voice to myself. So it was with surprise that I heard myself. "Sing with me," I said.

I gathered the pilgrims with my eyes and arms, and the poet Rumi's words rose from a half dozen throats, some subdued, some with mounting hope: "Come, come, whoever you are . . . ours is no caravan of despair. . ." The air gentled. Some bystanders hummed, a few sang along. Finally, child and grandma safe, we let our song fade, and our voyage began .

There are moments that shine, and forever illumine the meanings by which you understand your life. I know now that I am called to risk, to move beyond my comfort zone, and make a safe space where others can also stand. And when I do not know, I pray to trust a deeper wisdom to remind me of the time when healing happened with a song.

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Focus Questions:

1. When you have been faced with danger how have you responded?
2. In retrospect what would you have done differently?
3. What does the word "risk" mean to you?
4. How do you feel about taking risks?
5. What is one piece of advice you would give to a young person about taking risks in life?

Check-out/Likes & Wishes: Did this session meet your needs for connection and spiritual growth? Was our covenant honored?

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

When you come to the end of all the light you know, and it's time to step into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things shall happen: Either you will be given something solid to stand on or you will be taught to fly. ~ Edward Teller