

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY Plan for Facilitators
Poetry and Its Value
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA April 2004

Prepare the group at the prior session, asking them to bring a favorite poem or quote.

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

“If I had my life to live over again, I would have made it a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once a week; for perhaps the part of my mind now atrophied would have thus been kept active through use. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.” Charles Darwin

Reflection/Personal Sharing/Prayer (approximately 30 minutes) (The facilitator should briefly remind the group of confidentiality/anonymity, that this is not the time for cross conversation, etc.)

Focus Readings:

“Poetry avoids the last illusion of prose, which so gently sometimes and at others so passionately pretends that things are thus and thus. In poetry there are also thus and thus, but because of the arrangement of the lines, the pattern within the whole, will have it so. Exquisitely leaning toward an implied untruth, prose persuades us that we can trust our natures to know things as they are; ostentatiously faithful to its own nature, poetry assures us that we cannot—we know only as we can.” Charles Williams

“All I know, all I want to know is that I have found in my relations with my fellow men (and women) and in my glad beholding of the universe a reality of truth, goodness and beauty, and that I am trying to make my life as best I can a dedication to this reality. When I am in the thinking mood, I try to be rigorously rational, and thus not to go one step farther in my thoughts and language than my reason can take me. I then become uncertain as to whether I or any (person) can assert much about God, and fall back content into the mood of Job. When, however, in preaching or in prayer, in some high moment of inner communion or of profound experience with life among my fellows, I feel the pulse of emotion beating in my heart, and I am lifted up as though upon some sweeping tide that is more than the sluggish current of my days, I find it easy to speak as the poets speak, and cry, as so many of them cry, to God.

“But when I say ‘God,’ it is poetry and not theology. Nothing that any theologian ever wrote about God has helped me much, but everything that poets have written about flowers, and birds, and skies, and seas, and the saviors of the race, and God -- whoever He (or She) may be -- has at one time or another reached my soul! More and more, as I grow older, I live in the lovely thought of these seers and prophets. The theologians gather dust upon the shelves of my library, but the poets are stained with my fingers and blotted with my tears. I never seem so near truth as when I care not what I think or

believe but only with these masters of inner vision would live forever " John Haynes
Holmes

"Literature is the effort of man (sic) to indemnify himself for the wrongs of his
condition." Ralph Waldo Emerson

Focus Questions:

After reading your favorite poem, share what it means to you.

What role has poetry played in your life?

Checkout/Likes and Wishes (This is the time for facilitators to ask participants what they liked about this meeting and what they might wish for future meetings. This is also the time for any discussion of logistics.)

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice: From Herman Hesse

As every flower fades and as all youth
Departs, so life, at every stage,
So every virtue, so our grasp of truth,
Blooms in its, day and may not last forever.
Since life may summon us at every age
Be ready, heart, for parting, new endeavor,
Be ready bravely and without remorse
To find new light that old ties cannot give.
In all beginnings dwells a magic force
For guarding us and helping us to live.

Serenely let us move to distant places
And let no sentiments of home detain us.
The Cosmic Spirit seeks not to restrain us
But lifts us stage by stage to wider spaces.
If we accept a home of our own making,
Familiar habit makes for indolence.
We must prepare for parting and leave-taking
Or else remain the slaves of permanence.

Even the hour of our death may send
Us speeding on to fresh and newer spaces,
And life may summon us to newer races.
So be it, heart: bid farewell without end.