

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Circle Ministry 2009-2010

Porches and Decks

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)

In this ministry of circles, we speak of what matters most, and we listen. As we stand on spring's back porch and summer's threshold, I offer you a portion of Macrina Wiederkehr's "Listening to Summer." When you catch the refrain, join in.

Out of her pastel green pitcher
spring is pouring forth summer, and I am listening.
Out of her youthful, energetic body
summer is flowing, and I am listening.

I am listening.

I am listening to Earth leaning closer to the sun.
I am listening to the heat breathing through the gardens,
drawing life out of seeds,
calling plants to fruition,
whispering fulfillment to the flowers.
I am listening to the growing circle of life.

I am listening.

I am listening to the ripening
in the orchards,
in the vineyards,
in the garden,
in the grain fields,
I am listening to the ripening in my heart.

I am listening.

I am listening to the summer of my soul,
to the dance of life within me,
to the fruitful struggle of all that yearns for life,
to the perspiration that sweats out toxic poisons.
I am listening to the warmth of summer.

I am listening.

...I am listening to summer songs
of leisure and renewal.
I am listening to the sound of happy voices
playing on the beaches,
shouting at the ball games,
sharing stories on the porches....

I am listening.

Check-in/Sharing (3-4 minutes@ - 30-40 minutes)**Topical Discussion (60 minutes)**

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

First response

Cross-conversation

Topic: Porches and Decks

“I am listening to summer songs of leisure and renewal,” writes Macrina Wiederkehr and continues:

“I am listening to the sound of happy voices
 playing on the beaches,
 shouting at the ball games,
 sharing stories on the porches.”

Porches and decks invite friends and family gathering on warm summer evenings. Open porches, with no doors, no gates, and open decks inviting sunlight and starlight, remind us to slow down. For many of us they are the stages of gentle dramas that play out from our childhood into our ripest years. They are the settings of memories that linger lifelong.

In the closing passages of Richard Bausch’s essay, “The Porch” he recounts the cross-generational across-the-years arrivals and departures, births and deaths, that mark his family and then conjures up “the big old family home” now gone. He recounts a time of standing on the steps of its porch “with that feeling of being on a sort of promontory or precipice—that sense of the world out there, separate from this world here, with its familiar and so comfortably beloved sounds, even in the complication of fearing the changes I am just old enough to know are coming.....

And I think how the house we live in now has its own wide porch, where my children watch storms and bask in the twilight warmth, and sing and slowly swing on the wooden swing, and with me, raise their voices in one another’s hearing.... And I think how, if the feeling is right and the love is as excellent and brave as it was when I was young, these children will carry the porch with them out into the harshness and turmoil of the world, and it will go on providing for them, even when they are far away, even this house, too, is gone, and they have all come to see other places as the places that have for love and shelter.”

Take a moment of silence and consider your response to this question:

1. Imagine carrying a long ago porch or deck with you into your reflections of this morning/afternoon/evening. Share a story of a memory that lingers from that space of gathering on summer days and summer nights, or a story of how such space resonates for you now, as “this spring is pouring forth this summer.”

What concluding thoughts would you like to share?

Feedback (15 minutes)

Clarify what you will focus on for your final session in June and when you will meet. If this is your final session, thank the group for their participation and remind them that if they haven’t yet signed on for Circle Ministry 2010-2011, they may do so at the CM bulletin board in the Parish House. Note that the session plan for this gathering is available for group members as we leave.

Closing (1 minute)

Go in peace. Go with gratitude that we are alive to breathe in the day at hand.

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!