

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
Circle Ministry Session Plan

*Purpose and Promise*

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 reading (1 minute)**

“Here we have gathered, gathered side by side;  
circle of kinship, come and step inside!  
May all who seek here find a kindly word;  
may all who speak here feel they have been heard.  
Sing now together this, our hearts’ own song.”

Alicia S. Carpenter, *Singing the Living Tradition*, 360

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

**Discussion (60 minutes)**

**Topic: Purpose and Promise**

What is our purpose as we join in Circle Ministry? Why have we signed on? It’s likely that each of us has a slightly different reason—possibly many reasons. For our circle to work for everyone, it must be grounded in trust. Trust doesn’t just happen. It’s intentional. It unfolds from the keeping of well thought out promises. We forge long-term friendships, marriage included, over a period of years. The more intentional we are, the more likely we’ll keep the promises we might make, implicitly and explicitly, at the outset of these relationships. This is how trust grows. What do our promises look like? Like a behavioral covenant.

At our last gathering you received the sample behavioral covenant. While there are elements of that covenant that are core to our Circle Ministry at First Parish, you may wish to add to it or modify it so as to lift up particular hopes and concerns that you bring to this circle.

Before we move into the specifics of our behavioral covenant, I’m wondering: What are some experiences that you have had around the matter of promise or covenant—promises kept and not kept—that would help us understand and respect the importance of covenant?

Again, we’ll pause for a moment, so you can ponder this question and your response. Then I would ask each of you to share your response—with no feedback from the others, but in whichever order you’d like. We’ll then move into a discussion of our purpose and promise vis-à-vis our baseline document and shape it in a way that works for us.

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

First response

Cross-conversation

Concluding statements

[During the cross-conversation, ensure that you cover all the areas of the baseline document: respect for one another's time; commitment to attend; sharing "airtime;" general respect; and service to others. Move toward a covenant of consensus by which everyone can "live the Circle." This might not mean full agreement, but willingness for some to live with a particular part of the covenant if "x" is modified, albeit with the affirmation of the others. The desired end is a document that works for the whole group.]

### **Feedback (15 minutes)**

Thank the group for their feedback. Explain that each group member will have a copy of the final covenant by the next session and that you may from time to time place this written covenant near your circle's chalice when you're feeling a special need to hold up the common covenant.

Explain that for the next session, we'll consider how we experience the holidays, through the topic "'tis the season!"

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

### **Closing (1 minute)**

From Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay on Friendship:

"I do not wish to treat friendships daintily, but with roughest courage. When they are real, they are not glass threads or frostwork, but the solidest thing we know.

...Respect so far the holy laws of this fellowship as not to prejudice its perfect flower by your impatience for its opening. We must be our own before we can be another's."