

Circle Ministry 2008-2009

*Race and Class*

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 circle of trust and respect,  
let us stretch our minds and hearts around topics  
that stretch them further.  
Let us lift our minds and hearts toward topics  
that lift them higher and higher.  
Let us be reminded that this ministry of circles  
holds the power not just to affirm,  
but to transform our lives individual and communal.

Let us gather once again, lighting our chalice,  
that our time together  
might be illumined in spirit and in truth.

**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: Race and Class**

Race as a construct is economic and social. To be black or brown or white or “red” says nothing about a person except in economic and social terms. Racism may be defined as prejudice plus power, power that is economic and social, not biological and not anthropological. Rev. Dr. James Cone, Charles A. Briggs Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at New York City’s Union Theological Seminary since 1969, describes racism as “America’s original sin and, as it is institutionalized at all levels of society, its most persistent and intractable evil.” He writes as an African American and observes that:

“No day passes in which blacks don’t have to deal with white supremacy. It is found everywhere—in the churches, in seminaries, at publishing houses, in government, and all around the world. There is no escape. If whites get tired of talking about race, just imagine how people of color feel.”

Rev. Gary Smith, Senior Minister of First Parish UU in Concord, Massachusetts since 1988, reflects on the community he serves:

“It is a church and a town of enormous privilege. I often find myself co-opted by the culture of entitlement there. And yet I try to stand outside of it, too. In sermons and in

conversation, I refer to Concord as a ‘theme park,’ and I make fun of members’ ‘trophy cars.’ And I laugh, and the congregation laughs, nervously.....I challenge First Parish, to the best of my ability, to live outside the boundaries of safety, to live with absurdity, to face death and uncertainty and tragedy and not give up on this world or each other.”

(quotes from Dr. Cone and Rev. Smith found in  
*Soul Work: anti-racist theologies in dialogue*,  
edited by Marjorie Bowen-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones,  
Skinner House Books, Boston, 3, 13-14; 67 respectively)

*Where is our holy church? Where race and class unite  
as equal persons in the search for beauty, truth, and right.*

We sing these words of Edwin Henry Wilson as we worship together. How do we live them? As we proceed with our conversation, there is no assumption that this is a single-color group or that all of us come from similar backgrounds of privilege or lack of it.

[Options for the conversation to follow:

- 1) Read and consider one question before going to the next; or
- 2) Choose and consider only one question; or
- 3) If you decide to consider both questions, you may not do a “go-around” for the second.]

Take a moment of silence and consider these questions.

1. Tell a story of how your understanding of race and racism has shifted. If it hasn’t, tell a story about why.
2. To what extent do you feel you live in “a culture of entitlement” and how does your understanding impact your day-to-day behavior?

What concluding thoughts would you like to share?

### **Feedback (10 minutes)**

Thank the group. Ask what they liked in this session and what changes they would hope for. Explain that for the next session, we’ll consider the topic, “Mothers” (just in case you thought THIS topic was tough!)

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

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

Go with the muscles of your souls stretched,  
because this is what it feels like to speak the truth in love.

## 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!**