

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
Circle Ministry 2009-2010

*Regrets*

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)**

Why do we call this Circle Ministry?

In a circle we gather; everyone is equal.

Each is invited to speak; all are counted on to listen.

Ministry happens as we hear each other's words  
and listen sometimes between the lines.

Ministry happens as we speak our truths in trust  
that we'll be accepted not *because of*,  
but sometimes, *anyway*.

Ministry happens because service is given and received,  
like an offering on Sunday morning.

Ours is an offering of giving and receiving who we are,  
who we've been,  
and how we might be.

as we discover that in our midst lies another chance  
to love and be loved.

**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: Regrets**

"No Regrets" was the signature song of French singer icon Edith Piaf, whose brief, intense, and heart-rending life captured the affection and devotion of her audiences. She grew up on the streets, abandoned by her parents, then joined her father, a street acrobat, who recognized the appeal of his daughter's voice. For years the streets were her stage. In 1935, at the age of 20, she was discovered by a nightclub owner and propelled into the stature of France's most celebrated popular singer. It was he who gave her the nickname that followed her lifelong, "the little sparrow." Piaf was 4'8". Adored for the plaintive ballads that she sang from the depths of her soul, she was never able to find wholeness or peace. Yet she clasped her hands and sang out:

No! No regrets

No! I will have no regrets

For the grief doesn't last

It is gone

I've forgotten the past

Perhaps she “protested too much.” There are times and circumstances that we all wish had been different, choices made and actions taken that we do indeed regret. Some may fade with time. Others may linger as scars of soul and psyche. But just about everyone has some regrets.

[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. What do you most regret—either not having done or having done?
2. What has most helped you to make peace with your regrets?

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 do something different. Ask them to bring an object that holds deep meaning for them as they have moved through their life and their spiritual journey. It could be a letter, a stone, a hat, a photograph—whatever, but something that qualifies for them as “A Life Souvenir,” the topic of our next session.

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

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

Whatever our regrets, each of us is worthy of the gift of life.  
Go in peace.  
Go in hope.  
Go 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!**