

Circle Ministry Session Plan

Relaxation and Renewal

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 words (1 minute)

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

from the poetry of Wendell Berry, "The Peace of Wild Things"

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

Discussion (60 minutes)

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

First response

Cross-conversation

Concluding statements

Topic: Relaxation and Renewal

Worn out, burnt out, fried, stretched, overwhelmed, overworked, overscheduled—feelings familiar to us all, states of being all too common in our lives too short to do it all and be it all, our days too short to move through the entirety of our too long to-do lists. How to relax and renew? How to let it go and let it be?

Remember those words from the 1970 hit issued by the Beatles? *Let It Be*. Written by Paul McCartney, it was released as a single in March 1970. A few months later it became the title track for the Beatles' twelfth and final album, *Let It Be*. This was a time when The Beatles were coming apart as a group and a few of them were coming apart in their personal lives. It was a time of flux, confusion, and conflict, yet they sang together this song with the refrain:

Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be.

Whisper words of wisdom, let it be.

Take a few moments of silence and ponder your responses to these questions:

1. Think of a time in your life when it felt like things were falling apart or when, in Wendell Berry's words, "despair for the world grows" inside you. Where did you go? What did you do? How did you let go? How did you let it be? How did you relax?
2. Now think about afterwards—after you found a way to let go, let be, and relax? How did you feel? How was this renewing? How were you then free to do or be in ways that wouldn't have been possible had you not let go for awhile?

(Read through both 1 and 2 and choose for discussion the questions that best fit your group.)

What concluding thoughts would you like to share?

Feedback (15 minutes)

Thank the group.... Ask what they liked and what variations they would hope for.

Explain that the next session will be the last formal session of this Circle Ministry year and that while some groups may be meeting a few times over the summer, groups will begin officially in early October. Sign-ups are underway. For the single Circle Ministry session in June, we'll consider the topic "Saving and Savoring."

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

Closing (1 minute)

When you have way too much to do, don't!
Go in peace.

Circle Ministry Session Sequence for Facilitators

First Parish Unitarian Universalist – Cohasset

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!