

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
Circle Ministry 2008-2009

*Resilience*

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)**

On the threshold of spring,  
let us take heart that we have ridden the whitecaps of winter.  
On the threshold of spring,  
let us celebrate the residue of lingering crystalline whiteness,  
even as we cheer on the crocus and forsythia.  
On the threshold of spring,  
let us affirm this circle whose caring  
has warmed us through the deepest of chills.  
On the threshold of spring,  
let us be in this moment of threshold.  
Astride these seasons of our living,  
let us be present again to one another.

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

**Discussion of congregational and community service plans (10-20 minutes)**

**Topical Discussion (60 minutes)**

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

First response

Cross-conversation

**Topic: Resilience**

Some of you remember Plastic Man, a figure in long ago comic books. Plastic Man didn't quite leap buildings. He stretched across them—buildings and chasms. He survived. He rescued. His was a heroic elasticity. Plastic Man was “beyond resilient.”

While none of us are quite up to the antics of Plastic Man, we've known our own capacity to stretch. We've discovered—sometimes readily, sometimes with the greatest of resistance—how elastic we are. Sometimes it hurts to stretch. Sometimes we don't want to ride those waves. Sometimes we're terrified of a circumstance bearing down on us. Resilience to the rescue! It is one of the most energizing, soul restoring manifestations of grace.

Hear the poet Jane Hirshfield's outlook on resilience. Entitled “Optimism,” she writes that:

More and more I have come to admire resilience.  
Not the simple resistance of a pillow, whose foam  
returns over and over to the same shape, but the sinuous

tenacity of a tree: finding the light newly blocked on one side,  
it turns in another. A blind intelligence, true.  
But out of such persistence arose turtles, rivers,  
mitochondria, figs--all this resinous, unretractable earth.

How does resilience play out for you?

[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.]

**NOTE:** As discussion begins, encourage participants to pause after each speaker registers their initial thoughts, so that we can all digest the words of each.

1. Share an experience past or present that has tapped your resilience. How were you able to stretch and persevere, perhaps like “the sinuous tenacity of a tree,” perhaps like a slightly more modest “Plastic Man or Woman?”
2. Who comes to mind when you think of a person who helped you to become resilient? Tell us about her/him.

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, “Spiritual Practices.”

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

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

Go with the arms of your soul stretching  
beyond your expectations,  
preparing you for whatever it is that calls you  
to bend and flex and grow.  
Go in peace. Go in hope.

## 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!**