

# Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Circle Ministry 2009-2010

## *Resilient Spirit*

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)**

Winds blow,  
snow flies,  
sleet pounds,  
tides swell.

Watch the cormorant—

diving,  
dipping,  
soaring,  
skimming.

Watch the cormorant—

wings spread,  
feathers full,  
beak focused,  
body bending,  
being,  
alive.

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

#### **Service ventures (10 minutes)**

If you haven't already done so, move toward your group's focus for a service venture benefitting this congregation and a service venture benefitting our larger community.

#### **Topical Discussion (60 minutes)**

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

First response

Cross-conversation

#### **Topic: The Resilient Spirit**

Suffering is a given, as our Buddhist friends remind us. I have a friend who taught me that those among us on the other side of the most harrowing experiences of disaster, war and civil strife are not victims, but survivors. Victims cry for help. Survivors cry for solidarity, for kinship. Suffering is relative; so is survival.

Polly Young-Eisendrath, PhD, professor and psychologist, wrote in her book *The Resilient Spirit* that “...the capacity to be resilient, to respond to difficulty with development, is rooted in many diverse factors, but it consistently depends on one thing: the meaning you, the individual, make of where you are. When suffering leads to meanings that unlock the mysteries of life, it strengthens compassion, gratitude, joy, and wisdom. When suffering leads to barriers and retaliations and hatred, it empties you of hope and love, and then misery will lead to misery...”

The resilient spirit is the person who finds in herself, in himself, beside her, beside him, the means requisite to move into the next moment and the next with dignity and hope. Spirited resilience carries wisdom and compassion and the promise of life yet to be lived with grace and gratitude beyond the confines of what we once imagined were our due.

[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.]
1. Share a story from your life of how you moved through an experience from which you thought you may well not survive, but you did. What was it like? How has it changed you?
  2. How has the resilient spirit in you been nurtured by another human being or a community of persons? What do you most value in this nurturing?

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, “Animal Friend.”

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

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

It is a time for open hearts, open minds, and resilient spirits.

It is a time to listen deeply and to speak with transparency.

It is a time to plan and to dream.

It is also a time to be in the moment and to cherish this moment, together.

## 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!**