

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

“Rites of Passage”

Rev. Maj-Britt Johnson, The Community Church of Chapel Hill Unitarian Universalist (NC), May 2010

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting:

We light this chalice each time we meet as a ritual act which says, this is a sacred time we are marking in our lives. The flame reminds us that we are not alone, that our being together sustains us, sustains life itself, and will light our way into new territory.

Check in:

For the one hour drop-in groups: A brief check in such as “how is it with your spirit today?”

For the two hour covenant groups: What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing. Each person in the group speaks uninterrupted for approximately ____ minutes.

Introduction to the topic: This month we are celebrating several rites of passage in our congregation. For the first time we will have a Coming of Age service for our 14-15 year olds. And then the Rise Up service marking the passage of various children and youth to a new plateau in their schooling. It might be a good time of year for adult to reflect on our rites of passage as well.

In our society the primary rites of passage, some of which we honor with rituals, some we don't, are:

Being born

First day of school

The birth of a sibling

Coming of age (confirmation or bar or bat mitzvah)

Getting your driver's license

first date/first kiss

graduation (high school and for some college and for some others, graduate school)

Leaving home

Marriage (for some)

children (for some)

Remarriage (for some)

Losing a job

Geographical relocation

Retirement

Death

Reading: *“From Wikipedia: Rites of passage have three phases: separation, transition, and re-incorporation. In the first phase, people withdraw from their current status and prepare to move from one place or status to another. There is often a detachment or ‘cutting away’ from the former self in this phase, which is signified in symbolic actions and rituals. For example, the cutting of the hair for a person who has just joined the army. He or she is ‘cutting away’ the former self - the civilian. The transition (or liminal) phase is the period between states, during which one has left one place or state but hasn't yet entered or joined the next; in the third phase,*

having completed the rite and assumed their 'new' identity, one re-enters society with one's new status. Re-incorporation is characterized by elaborate rituals and ceremonies, like debutante balls and college graduation."

Questions (choose one to respond to)

Much of the territory we travel through in adulthood is unmarked. Which passages might be ahead for you, for which there are no established rites or rituals? How do you feel about that?

Which of the rites of passage you have already experienced affected you most? How?

Guidelines for Sharing – (leader reads these guidelines, or has another person do it, then s/he can repeat the questions again)

We'll each speak for roughly _____minutes, with no cross talk or interruptions. Cross talk means advice giving, blaming, trying to fix another person. It is wise to speak in the first person, "I think, I feel..."

When we are listening: Try to listen to each other as if you were listening to, or watching, your own thoughts. Let others' words simply fall down into your heart. It is not necessary to give the person reassurances that they are being heard, such as nodding or eye contact. By simply listening together we create a holding space for each speaker. Comfort and care can be offered after the group session.

When it is your turn to speak it is not necessary to respond to the persons who have gone before you, though you may find yourself building on what has been shared already. Find out what your own inner wisdom wants to say. Together we create a quilt of wisdom, the design is a surprise.

(Leader can re-read the questions here)

-Sharing around the circle

-After everyone has shared (some groups go around twice, or more)...

Likes and Wishes – What did you like about this session? What would you wish to be different if anything?

-Closing words

All things of tenderness and grace, bless our minds and lift us up forever.

All works of strength, bless our minds and lift us up forever.

All memories of love, bless our minds and lift us up forever.

from a poem by Elizabeth M. Strong, in "Bless This Child"