

Circle Ministry 2008-2009

*Rituals and Traditions*

Rev. Jan Carlsson-Bull for Circle Ministry at First Parish UU Cohasset, MA

Adapted from the session plan created by Rev. Glenn H. Turner

**Note: See the Circle Ministry Session Sequence for process guidelines.**

**Gathering, Welcoming (2 minutes)**

**Chalice lighting & Opening words (1 minute)**

I offer you Diane Le Moomey's "Solstice."

Again did the earth shift  
Again did the nights grow short,  
And the days long.

And the people  
of the world were glad  
and celebrated  
each in their own ways.

**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: Rituals and Traditions**

No sooner do the leaves fall than we're into the holidays of Autumn and Winter. Each of us, having different origins and histories, mark these times with different rituals and traditions. Thanksgiving and Christmas are not the only holidays. For some of us, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa light up this time of darkness. For many of us, the holidays are not experienced with whole-hearted joy and gratitude. If you type "dealing with the holidays" into a Google search, you'll find entries for holiday blues, stress, depression, and tips on diet.

Max Coots has more to say about this time, especially about what tends to surround Christmas. He reflects:

I hadn't felt as Christmasy as usual this year. I don't know why. Maybe it was because the air stayed autumn-warm so late this year, and the ground was bare, and even green long after it's usually white. Maybe it was the lack of lights. Whatever the reason, I didn't get that feeling that is half-child, half-adult. Maybe it was as much inner as outer weather that kept Christmas at arms-length from me; an inner climate made up of something older, or tired, or busy, or bored. But whatever the reason, the annual star, like a much-publicized comet, didn't blaze so brightly as advertised over the ordinary fields where I shepherd my concerns. But I need Christmas. I need it to remind me that every year a child is born, every year an heir is given, every year angels in disguises of all kinds sing glory and make promises in the cold. I need it. We all do. The season is dark and cold.

But Christmas came. It fell out of the sky, white and cold, but not so cold as the bare, empty days before. Christmas came, in the mailbox with old friends' names folded up inside. It came hung in round, green greetings let out of front doors to remind the street what time of

year it is. It came through my ears, in my eyes, in old echoes and fragile memories. It came, as it always comes, like a light in my darkness.

[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. As we move through the holidays of fall and winter, how are they happening for you? What are the rituals and traditions that you anticipate, that sustain you, that give meaning to your life? What grates on your nerves or even depresses you?
2. What helps you through this season?

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, “Expectations.”

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

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

We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.

May we, in this season, be grateful for what we are given, and for the joy of giving.

Go in love. Go in peace.

## 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!**