

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY Plan for Facilitators  
**Sacred Places**

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, January 2004

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting: From May Sarton

“Come out of the dark earth  
Here where the minerals  
Glow in their stone cells  
Deeper than seed or birth.  
Come into the pure air  
Above all heaviness  
Of storm and cloud to this  
Light-possessed atmosphere.  
Come into, out of, under  
The earth, the wave, the air.  
Love, touch us everywhere  
With primeval candor.”

Reflection/Personal Sharing/Prayer (approximately 30 minutes)

(The facilitator should briefly remind the group of confidentiality/anonymity, that this is not the time for cross conversation, etc.)

Focus Readings: From *The Sacred* by Stephen Dunn

“After the teacher asked if anyone had  
a sacred place  
and the students fidgeted and shrank

in their chairs, the most serious of them all  
said it was his car  
being in it alone, his tape deck playing

things he’d chosen and others knew the truth  
had been spoken  
and began speaking about their rooms,  
their hiding places, but the car kept coming up,  
their car in motion,  
music filing it, and sometimes one other person

who understood the bright altar of the dashboard  
and how far away  
a car could take him from the need

to speak, or to answer, the key  
is having a key

and putting it in, and going.”

From *Self-Consciousness* by John Updike (remembering returning to his hometown.)

“Toward the end of Philadelphia Avenue, beside the park that surrounds the town hall, I turned and looked back up the straight sidewalk in the soft evening gloom, looking for what the superstitious old people of the county used to call a ‘sign.’ The pavement squares, the housefronts, the remaining trees receded in silence and shadow. I loved this plain street, where for thirteen years no great harm had been allowed to befall me. I loved Shillington not as one loves Capri or New York, because they are special, but as one loves one’s own body and consciousness, because they are synonymous with being. It was exciting for me to be in Shillington, as if my life, like the expanding universe, when projected backwards gained heat and intensity. If there was a meaning to existence, I was closest to it here.”

#### Focus Questions:

Did you have a special place when you were young in your house, yard, nearby where you felt safe, special? Where was it, what was it like, and what did you feel there?

Are there places you have visited that have a special feeling for you?

Do you have a place where that special feeling is readily accessible?

What makes something feel like sacred ground to you?

What so-called sacred places have you visited?

Do you believe there are special places on earth that rightly could be understood as being sacred ground?

#### Checkout/Likes and Wishes

(This is the time for facilitators to ask participants what they liked about this meeting and what they might wish for future meetings. This is also the time for any discussion of logistics.)

#### Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice: From Wendell Berry

“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.”