

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Circle Ministry Session Plan
Saving and Savoring
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 (1 minute)

Opening words (1 minute)

At the conclusion of her book, *turning to one another: simple conversations to restore hope to the future*, Margaret J. Wheatley has this to say:

I think of a gesture of love as anything we do that helps others discover their humanity. Any act where we turn to one another. Open our hearts. Extend ourselves. Listen. Any time we're patient. Curious. Quiet. Engaged.

...I feel we become more fully human through our generosity, when we extend to another rather than withdraw into ourselves.

Conversation does this—it requires that we extend ourselves, that we open our minds and hearts a bit more, that we turn to someone, curious about how they live their life.

...Speaking to each other involves risk. It's often difficult to extend ourselves, to let down our guard, especially with those we fear or avoid. When we're willing to overcome our fear and speak to them, that is a gesture of love. Strangely, what we say is not that important. We have ended the silence that keeps us apart.

...When we're brave enough to risk a conversation, we have the chance to rediscover what it means to be human. In conversation, we practice good human behaviors. We think, we laugh, we cry, we tell stories of our day. We become visible to one another. We gain insights and new understandings. And as we stay in conversation, we may discover that we want to be activists in our world. We get interested in what we can do to change things. Conversation wakes us up. We no longer accept begin treated poorly. We become people who work to change our situation.

Conversation helps us reclaim these very human capacities and experiences. That is a gesture of love.

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

Discussion (60 minutes)

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

First response

Cross-conversation

Concluding statements

Topic: Saving and Savoring

There are many ways to say it:

Presbyterian minister and writer Frederick Buechner, now 81 and living in Vermont, describes our true vocation, our true calling, as “the place where your deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.”

Essayist, poet, and literary stylist E.B. White, who shared birthdays with Buechner, though he was born 27 years earlier, offered a finer timeline to the notion of calling:

“I arise in the morning, torn between the desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (to savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.”

Take a few moments of silence and ponder your responses to these questions:

1. Today, or maybe even tomorrow, how do you plan to savor the world, to experience your “deep gladness?”
2. Today, or maybe even tomorrow, how do you plan to help save the world, to play a part in meeting the “world’s deep need?”

(Read through both 1 and 2 and choose for discussion the questions that best fit your group.)

What concluding thoughts would you like to share?

Feedback (15 minutes)

Thank the group....

Clarify that this is the concluding session of this first season of Circle Ministry. For some, you may have plans to meet once or twice in the summer, but this is the formal conclusion of our first season. Sunday, September 23, we’ll celebrate Circle Ministry in our worship, with Peter Bowden sharing the pulpit with Jan and opportunities for folks who haven’t yet experienced Circle Ministry to try a sample session after the service.

Circle Ministry gatherings begin in October. Sign-ups are underway, with each circle’s time posted on the bulletin board in the hallway of the Parish House.

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

Closing (1 minute)

Like Margaret Wheatley, whose words marked the opening of this time together, we’re moving into a conclusion. Unlike Margaret Wheatley, ours is a conclusion not of a book, but of a chapter. There is more to say, more to hear, more to learn, more to do. We’re moving on in this ministry of circles. Let us hold each other in our hearts and minds, as blessings given and blessings received.

Circle Ministry Session Sequence for Facilitators

First Parish Unitarian Universalist – Cohasset

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!