

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Circle Ministry 2009-2010

September 11: That Blue-Sky Day (9/11)

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)

We listen. We listen to ourselves. We listen to each other.

WE listen to the steady rhythms of our heartbeats,
rhythms that accelerate as we sometimes listen and hear those pivot points:
“Before this.....after that.....it all changed.
Nothing is the same.”

We each hold a story. We are walking libraries of stories.

What’s yours? What hers? What’s his?
Listen. Hear. Be changed once again.

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: That Blue-Sky Day (9/11)

We each have a 9/11 story—heart-wrenching, riveting, pivotal, inspiring, whatever, but most surely a story engraved in our soul and psyche. However other disasters have visited this world, for perhaps everyone here 9/11 means September 11, 2001. From these stories that mark our “before 9/11...after 9/11” we open wider our “windows on the world.”

Liz Godwin of New Paltz, New York tells her story in the November 2007 issue of *The Sun*.

In September 2001, fresh out of graduate school, I moved to rural Florida and lived in a trailer park for sky divers alongside the runway of a municipal airport. I taught middle school for a living and went sky diving each afternoon with my fellow residents.

The morning of September 11, 2001, the phone rang in my classroom. I’d given my mom the direct number but warned her never to call unless it was a family emergency. When I picked up, she blurted, “The first thing you need to know is that your father is OK. All right? Somebody crashed an airplane into the World Trade Center.”

My dad worked for a law firm with offices on the fifty-seventh floor of Tower One. He was in a meeting at another firm’s office that day. Had the planes struck just an hour later, he would have been among the throngs trying to escape.

That afternoon, with civilian air traffic grounded all over the country, I came home to find the planes tied down at the airport. Gone was the familiar drone of commercial jets flying in and out of nearby Tampa. In the eerie stillness, I impulsively got on my bike and sped straight down the middle of the mile-long runway—an inconceivable stunt on a normal day. At the end, I lay down on the warm tarmac to rest. Barefoot, hands behind my head, I gazed into that sky devoid of contrails and marveled at the surreal quiet. The serenity seeped into me and stilled my racing thoughts until I could hear only my heart. In the fading light I was suddenly grounded.

[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. On 9/11/01 where did you go and what did you do to feel grounded?
2. What does your 9/11 experience mean to you now? How are you different? How are you the same?

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, “The Kitchen Table.”

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

Closing (1 minute)

May all who were lost rest in peace.

May all the rest of us live for it.

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!