

Sexual Being/Human Wholeness

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)

Why do we come together in this ministry of circles?

Hold a moment of silence and think about this.

[Silence]

[Light chalice]

We light our chalice that the flame might reflect our reasons for being,
for being here, for being here and now, for being here and now together.

Each of us is an arc in this circle.

Together we are a whole circle.

So it is that we assemble the stories of our living,

each a piece, each a fragment,

and shape them in the course of a few precious hours,

into some semblance of a complete work, some semblance of a whole.

Only in community can we gather our missing pieces.

Only in community can we make sense of our fragments.

Only in community, can we re-assemble the parts

into some semblance of a complete work, some semblance of a whole.

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

Discussion of congregational and community service plans (10 minutes tops). Note that some of our groups have already completed these plans or clarified what they will do.

Topical Discussion (60 minutes)

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

First response

Cross-conversation

Topic: Sexual Being-Human Wholeness

Our Bodies Ourselves is the title of a series of books published over the last several decades by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective. Consider the title itself—"our bodies, ourselves." Male or female or however we define our gender, we're reminded that we are one with our bodies. Body and psyche, body and soul, don't exist in separate rooms of the self. Human wholeness is inclusive of body, psyche, soul...and yes, sexuality.

How does our sexuality come into play with our sense of wholeness? It's only one dimension of who we are, but it is integral to how we define ourselves. I'm male. I'm female. I'm transgender. OR I'm gay. I'm straight. I'm lesbian. I'm bisexual. Such statements hint at who we are, but they don't tell the whole story. Psychologist Jacqueline Hudak notes that the

categories of heterosexual and homosexual, for example, “are both time-bound and culture specific.” In our society, heterosexuality has become the default, with other sexual affinities being marginalized and often punished. As a result, “...there have been very few attempts to explain how an individual develops a *heterosexual* orientation. Research has focused upon homosexuality precisely because it has been viewed as deviant.”

Categorical definitions of sexual identity or sexual affinity lead to assumptions about what is one’s “true self.” Yet therapists, certainly family therapists, encounter “complex individual and family stories, the trajectories of which do not fit into tidy categories or theory.” The challenge is to question what is silent and invisible in “cultural narratives” and encourage conversations that move beyond categories. “It is,” writes Hudak, “that moment of abiding connection to each other that has such integrity for clients, their partners and children, whether gay or straight at that moment in time, who together call themselves *family*.” Abiding connection is possible when we understand ourselves first and foremost as members of the human family, fully affirming the variations in how we understand ourselves as sexual beings within that largest of families.

[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.]

NOTE: As discussion begins, encourage participants to pause after each speaker registers their initial thoughts, so that we can all digest the words of each.

1. When did you first become aware of your sexuality? What emotions do these memories evoke for you?
2. Talk about changes you’ve had, if any, in your thinking about sexual identity or sexual orientation.

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 Seeds We Plant.”

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

Closing (1 minute)

Go, trusting that our minds can shift and our hearts can open toward “abiding connections” in the service of our human wholeness.

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!