

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
Circle Ministry 2009-2010  
***Shared Ministry***

With the wise counsel of Jack Martin  
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're all in this together.

It's a reminder that we're part of nature, not apart from it.

It's a reminder that we're all members of the human family.

It's a reminder that we're all members of the family  
that lives and breathes in myriad forms.

It's a call to honor "the interdependent web of all existence  
of which we are a part."

For religious community, it's a model of aspiration.

In this liberal religious community,  
in this ministry of circles,  
each of us is called.

We're all in this together,  
this ministry that's shared.

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

**Check-in on the upcoming May 7 Circle Ministry Potluck, confirming what your group is providing and if attendance is what it was when you first asked.**

**Topical Discussion (60 minutes)**

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

First response

Cross-conversation

**Topic: Shared Ministry**

Shared ministry emerges from a notion called "the priesthood of all believers." It's grounded in the early Christian understanding that experience of the divine was mediated solely through the figure of Jesus. No priests in the early Christian church. It was informal and egalitarian, with each believer called to use her or his particular gifts to strengthen the community.

Move ahead a few millennia. In the faith that came to be known as Unitarian Universalism, the notion of shared ministry took hold through our congregational polity—that is, the form of governance practiced. Just a few years ago a commission of the Unitarian Universalist Association issued a report called *Interdependence: Reviewing Congregational Polity*. *Interdependence* claimed that one of the core identifying marks of Unitarian Universalism is the belief that "ministry of the congregation does not belong exclusively to ordained clergy, but to everyone. ....we are all lay ministers, whether or not we choose to be professional religious leaders."

The 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian James Luther Adams brought this home in his understanding of the “priesthood and prophethood of all believers.” Proclaimed Adams,

“the prophetic liberal church is not a church in which the prophetic function is assigned merely to a few. ....The prophetic liberal church is the church in which all members share the common responsibility to attempt to foresee the consequences of human behavior...with the intention of making history in place of merely being pushed around by it.”

“Yikes!” you might be saying. What have we gotten ourselves into if we affiliate with such a community? Well, we’re not practicing our faith alone; nor are we led hierarchically. The emphasis is on caring and sharing in pastoral and prophetic community. There are guides, yes; there are leaders, yes. But we’re all in this together.

[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 your response to these questions:

1. What is your ministry? How do you make a difference in your community of faith and beyond?
2. If you were to fully affirm your ministry whenever you are here in this Circle Ministry, how would this impact your behavior and experience in the group?

What concluding thoughts would you like to share?

### **Feedback (15 minutes)**

Thank the group. Explain that for the next and for some of you, final session of this year, we’ll consider the topic, “Porches and Decks.”

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

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

Let us depart expectantly—  
 called to the ministry that is ours to do,  
 called to the ministry that is ours to be,  
 called to remember again and again  
 that we’re all in this together.

## 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!**