

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

*Silence*

Adapted from the session plan created by Rev. Amy Bowden Freedman  
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)**

Welcome all to the beginning of this fourth year of Circle Ministry at First Parish Unitarian Universalist in Cohasset. Affirm the presence of seasoned Circle Ministry participants. Extend a special welcome to folks who have never experienced Circle Ministry and to those who are new to your group. Invite them to ask questions freely and to make suggestions during the feedback segment.

**Chalice lighting & Opening words (1 minute)**

As I light our chalice, I offer you the words of Gunilla Norris:

Within each of us there is a silence-  
a silence as vast as a universe.  
We are afraid of it- and we long for it.

When we experience that silence, we remember  
who we are....

Silence is the source of all that exists,  
the unfathomable stillness where vibration began-  
the first oscillation, the first word,  
from which life emerged. Silence is our deepest nature,  
our home, our common ground, our peace.  
Silence reveals. Silence heals.  
Silence is where God dwells.  
We yearn to be there. We yearn to share it....

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

**Review of Behavioral Covenant and preview of session sequence (10 minutes)**

See Sample Behavioral Covenant. Fill in blanks of meeting times and places. Add elements that your group feels will enhance the Circle Ministry experience for each of you and for any new folks who may join over the course of the year ahead.

Preview the session sequence if you feel that this will help new members especially in orienting to the Circle Ministry structure.

**Topical Discussion (60 minutes)**

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

First response

Cross-conversation

**Topic: Silence**

We all like to talk. We all find it hard to listen. We find it even harder to be silent. Yet we crave silence. “Sharing silence with others is a profound act of trust, love, and courtesy,” writes Gunilla Norris. “It is a mutual gift, a necessity, a helping hand, a path and a discipline.”

Let’s center in a meditation of silence. Find a comfortable position with your feet on the floor and your back in an upright but relaxed posture.

[Facilitators: you may wish to dim the lights and focus on a candle, perhaps the candle in our chalice.]

Become aware of your breathing. Together let’s observe (5-10 minutes – whatever you decide for your group) silence.

[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 two or three questions, you may not do a “go-around” for the second and/or third.]

Consider these questions:

- 1) How does it feel to sit in silence? What is your relationship with silence?
- 2) How do you make room for silence in your life? If you have or had a silent meditation practice, describe your experience.
- 3) What would it take for you to sit in stillness for 5 to 20 minutes each day?

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, “That Blue-Sky Day (9/11).” Note that the session plan for this gathering is available for group members as we leave.

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

Let it go. Go in peace.  
Let it be. Be in peace.

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**Chalice lighting & Opening words (1 minute)**

As I light our chalice, I offer you the words of Fredrick Zydek, a “gentleman farmer” from Nebraska whose vast plains perhaps inspired him to write “Praying into the Stillness.”

You must gather yourself into the basket  
of your skin. Listen to the wind moving  
its divine puzzle in and around you.

Become aware that you are an observer  
to these events, a sojourner daring to enter  
the quiet slopes that lead to silence.

You must walk away from the sounds  
of your own voice echoing its way from  
neuron to neuron, from cell to DNA.

Let your thoughts go limp; help your inner  
noise change to luminescence, your focus  
to the moment when silence and light

Become one. Seek the place where you  
are hollow as a straw, thirsty as a desert,  
open as a window waiting for the wind.

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

**Review of Behavioral Covenant and preview of session sequence (10 minutes)**

See Sample Behavioral Covenant. Fill in blanks of meeting times and places. Add elements that your group feels will enhance the Circle Ministry experience for each of you and for any new folks who may join over the course of the year ahead.

Preview the session sequence if you feel that this will help new members especially in orienting to the Circle Ministry structure.

**Topical Discussion (60 minutes)**

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“Sharing silence with others is a profound act of trust, love, and courtesy,” continues Norris. “It is a mutual gift, a necessity, a helping hand, a path and a discipline.”

Let’s center in a meditation of silence. Find a comfortable position with your feet on the floor and your back in an upright but relaxed posture.

[Facilitators: you may wish to dim the lights and focus on a candle, perhaps the candle in our chalice.]

Become aware of your breathing. Together let’s observe (5-10 minutes – whatever you decide for your group) silence.

[Options for the conversation to follow:

- 4) Read and consider one question before going to the next; or
- 5) Choose and consider only one question; or
- 6) If you decide to consider both questions, you may not do a “go-around” for the second.]

Consider these questions:

1. How does it feel to sit in silence? How do you make room for silence in your life?
2. Tell a story of silence that healed you out of a deep hurt OR a story of how you “walked away from the sounds of your own voice” into a quiet peace unlike anything you had experienced.

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, “That Blue-Sky Day (9/11).”

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

**Closing (1 minute)**

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## 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!**