

Circle Ministry Session Plan

Technology as Tyranny

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)

The circle is a universal symbol for unity and wholeness and the form of meeting in circles is ancient. Each of us has ancestors, no matter what our ethnic or racial background, who sat around a fire together drumming, singing, playing, dancing, telling stories, praying, grieving together, solving the problems of everyday life. The memory of this connection to the circle is in our bodies, in our psyches.

It is time for us to come together in small groups that share the same goal: the creation of a compassionate community that values the wisdom and the welfare of all its members. A compassionate community of people who are willing to sustain our gaze upon suffering, upon the wounds that we inflict upon one another, and who are willing to become accountable for our actions.

Source Unknown

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: Technology as Tyranny

Technology is with us. A far cry from the room-size mainframe dubbed “Hal” in the 1968 film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, technology is affordable, portable, adaptable, and a seeming prerequisite for adeptness in the home, the workplace, and even the wilderness. We can connect beyond our wildest dreams, perhaps beyond our wildest nightmares.

In a column of January 30, 2001, journalist/author Thomas Friedman offers his impressions on the Davos World Economic Forum and hones in on what he observes as a “backlash brewing against the proliferation of technology in our lives.” “Digital Darwinism” he calls it. Friedman was especially taken by the comments of Microsoft researcher Linda Stone, who remarked that we live in an age of “continuous partial attention.” He explains. This means “that while you are answering your e-mail and talking to your kid, your cell phone rings and you have a conversation. You are now involved in a continuous flow of interactions in which you can only partially concentrate on each.”

He speaks from experience:

“I am struck by how many people call my office, ask if I’m in, and, if I’m not, immediately ask to be connected to my cell phone or pager. (I carry neither.) You’re never out anymore. The assumption now is that you’re always in. Out is over. Now you are always in, and when you are always in, you are always on.”

(from Thomas L. Friedman,
Longitudes and Attitudes: The World in the Age of Terrorism, Anchor Books, 2002, 17-18.)

Take a few moments of low-tech silence to consider your responses to these questions:

1. How has this age of laptops, cell phones, Palm Pilots, Blackberries, and i phones affected you?
2. In this age of pervasive technology, what is your take on Microsoft researcher Linda Stone’s claim that we have entered an age of “continuous partial attention?”

[You may want to read both questions and then proceed one at a time.]

What concluding thoughts would you like to share?

Feedback (15 minutes)

Thank the group.... Ask what they liked and what variations they would hope for.

Explain that for the next session, we’ll do something different and consider the topic “Relaxation and Renewal.”

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

Closing (1 minute)

“Only connect” reads the prologue to E.M. Forster’s 1910 novel, *Howards End*. May the *how* of our connecting harmonize with *why* we connect and honor all with whom we connect. .

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!