

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

The Kitchen Table

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 gather in this circle as we gather around a table.
Ours is a table of silence and sound.
It is a table of hearing and being heard.
Ours is a round table, filling the circle we form.
It is a table laden with the gifts of our stories and struggles and hopes.
It is a table holding a feast not yet prepared.
Each of us contributes to the feast.
We leave filled.

Bon appétit!

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: The Kitchen Table

It held the aroma of brown sugar cookies and pie crust, morning coffee and tinges of maple syrup. Right in the center of the kitchen it rose from sturdy legs, and why not; it was solid oak. The once handsome grain had been muted over the years with traces of piping hot casseroles in need of thicker hot pads, cookie sheets arrived straight from the oven, milk spilled again and again.

Every morning it drew a crowd—once-over-easies, orange juice, oatmeal with brown sugar, pancakes on Sundays—always downed by an eager host of growling tummies. Neighborhood women assembled at mid-day—time for a break—to discuss only the most riveting neighborhood news. Family holidays guaranteed heated political debates or hushed discussions of how uncle so-and-so was faring after his latest bout or rolled eyes over why cousin so-and-so couldn't stay married or raucous laughter over little darling's hiccoughs in the middle of her piano recital.

For the most heart-to-heart discussions we gathered around its benevolence. Like a family therapist it was, holding secrets told and surprises announced, storing in its oaken heart first hurts and final hopes. We counted on it. In fact, we learned to count on it.

Oh yes, we had a polished cherry table in the dining room, an early extravagance worthy of linen and lace. But the kitchen table drew us in for ample servings of who we were, what we are about, and how it all happened. Our kitchen table listened.

[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. Describe your earliest memories of a kitchen table.
2. What comes to mind when you visualize the kitchen table of your present home? If your kitchen table could speak, what story would it share first?

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, “Regrets.”

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

Closing (1 minute)

To hear and be heard is the most sumptuous of feasts.

You may now be excused.

Go quietly please and 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!