

Circle Ministry 2008-2009

The Middle of the Night

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)

Gather the spirit, harvest the power.

Our sep'rate lives will kindle one flame.

It's a favorite hymn, even a familiar hymn, a gift of the gifted Jim Scott, who will be in concert in our Meeting House on November 9.

Jim's lyrics continue, describing what we know in this circle as we gather spirit, harvest power, and kindle our chalice flame.....

Witness the mystery of this hour.

Our trials in this life appear all the same.

Gather in peace, gather in thanks,

Gather in sympathy now and then.

Gather in hope, compassion and strength.

Gather to celebrate once again.

Let us so gather [this morning/this afternoon/this evening].

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 Middle of the Night

As we consider "the middle of the night," other lyrics surface:

In the still of the night

As I gaze from my window

At the moon in its flight

My thoughts all stray to you

...Like the moon growing dim, on the rim of the hill

In the chill, still, of the night

This memorable Cole Porter song evokes...what? Nostalgia? Romance? Longing?

The still of the night, the middle of the night, evokes a host of associations:

A cry from the crib. "It's your turn to get up with the baby...."

The shrill ring of the phone and news of a new arrival.

The shrill ring of the phone and news of an accident, a death even.

A startled awakening from a bad dream.

A startled awakening from a bad dream and turning to someone who made it better.

Insomnia...relentless insomnia—whether to get up and read or try so hard to fall asleep.

Or perhaps awakening to “nature’s call” and en route, noticing a full moon and bright shining stars.

[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 a middle of the night experience that was a simple epiphany or life changing. What happened? How is it still resonating for you?
2. Close your eyes. It’s the middle of the night. Imagine your best possible dream and share it as you will.

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, “Home.”

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

Closing (1 minute)

May your nights be as peaceful as a lullaby
and your days, as vibrant as the morning star.

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!