

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Circle Ministry 2008-2009

The Seeds We Plant

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)

[Light chalice]

As we light our chalice, so we gather our spirit and harvest our power,
echoing the words of hymnist Jim Scott.

The song continues:

*Gather the spirit of heart and mind.
Seeds for the sowing are laid in store.
Nurtured in love, and conscience refined,
with body and spirit united once more.*

May “our sep’rate fires..kindle one flame” as we gather in this circle—
bringing our stories, our reflections, our hopes and our hurts.

May our chalice flame lend light and promise for our time together.

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 Seeds We Plant

“Seeds are the archetypal beginning, the unit of being,” write Carol Williams in *Bringing a Garden to Life*. She elaborates:

“Sometimes they are so small one can hardly see them. A tomato seed may be mistaken for a speck of dust, but a gardener drops it carefully into soil and covers it up, knowing that within that speck lies the whole story of first leaves, thickening stem, pale yellow flowers, fruit ripening green to scarlet, sweet tomato scent wafting through the summer air... I know of no garden work that goes so straight to the heart of the matter as planting a seed...”

What happens afterwards is a matter of watering, weeding, and waiting. The seeds need nourishment. Water is basic. The seedlings need space and freedom to take root and break through the soil. Weeding is called for—not always pleasant, but necessary. Then there is the waiting. Some seeds germinate quickly; others are “late bloomers.” In Williams’ words:

“Seeds that take a very long time to germinate present other challenges. Seeds of many perennial flowers and herbs are like this, and even a few annuals. They take so long that one tends to forget they are there...”

Waiting isn’t enough. Lest we “forget they are there,” we must be watchful and pay attention to the continuing needs of those seeds working underground. Williams reminds us that:

“Certain seeds...have minds of their own. More than once I have sown seeds in spring, seen no sign of life, given up, and then been surprised to see little plants the following year, or even the year after that, when they seem to have determined that conditions were more auspicious for coming into being.”

We plant seeds—literally and metaphorically. How our gardens grow is a common image for how our lives take shape as we sow and nurture and tend to or neglect that which matters. Sometimes we sow our time and talents and hopes, and our efforts seem barely noticeable so we struggle to sustain confidence that our efforts haven’t been in vain. If we “water and weed,” if we nurture what we have begun and let go of matters peripheral, AND if other circumstances are favorable, then what we have sown takes root and grows, even thrives.

Occasionally this all happens quickly, but commonly it takes so much time that we all but forget what we have sown. When that which we began many years ago seems suddenly to flourish, we are surprised, even amazed. We are “late bloomers.” Who would have known? We had all but given up hope, and then hope is realized—sometimes through luck and circumstance and sometimes through keeping faith that the seeds we planted long ago had a mind of their own.

[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.]

NOTE: As discussion begins, encourage participants to pause after each speaker registers their initial thoughts, so that we can all digest the words of each.

1. What “seeds” are you planting now? What are you “sowing”—through work, through family, through church, through community, through a long-cherished dream—that you hope with all your heart will come to fruition? Why is this so important to you?
2. Tell a story about something you started long ago and perhaps forgot about or even gave up on, and then, years later, found that it was beginning to flourish. How did this feel?

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, “Memory: The Glue That Holds Us Together.”

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

Closing (1 minute)

Go, trusting that every thought, every deed, is a seed we plant; it takes root; it matters.

Go in hope.

Go in trust.

Go in wonder.

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