



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network  
**WAKING UP WHITE: Session Plan**  
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**(TOPIC READINGS start on p. 4)**

### **OUR SMALL GROUP MISSION**

These Small Group conversations are offered as a way to get to know each other better, as we explore the various topics selected by our Small Group Team, related to our life experiences, questions, joys, and challenges. We are free to share our thoughts and feelings, joys and struggles, as we choose, and are here to listen to and care about each other. (We are NOT here to be a therapy group ~ or to tackle “church politics”!)

We look forward to building closer connections with each other, as we spend this time together, and form new or deeper friendships and build our sense of community.

### **OUR SMALL GROUP COVENANT**

As members of this Small Group of the Universalist Church, we covenant with each other to help make this experience both personally and spiritually rewarding, to nourish our sense of community, and to learn and practice right relationship.

We will try to arrive before the beginning of each session so that it can start on time. We will try to attend all of the meetings of our group unless we are ill or away, and will let the group know in advance when that will occur or by contacting the facilitator:

#### **Facilitator Contact information:**

We use these guidelines for sharing, as a pathway to a caring community:

- We will deeply listen and ask honest and open questions.
- We will respect confidentiality. What is said here stays here, unless we agree to share something outside of our group.
- We will allow others to speak without interruption.
- We will not try to fix, save, advise or correct.
- We will honor time for reflection and quietness and respect a member’s right to remain silent, as they choose.
- We will treat others with respect and without judgment.
- We will honor the diversity of thought and feeling and values among us.

### **CHECK IN**

Check-in is a time to deepen our connections with each other by sharing joys, sorrows, challenges, and changes in our lives. Sharing is not required. Only share if you are comfortable. What is shared in group is confidential.

Connection is the energy created between people when they feel seen, heard, valued and understood. One of the goals of small group is to move out of our heads and into our hearts in order to deepen our connections with one other.

Authentic sharing from a place of honesty and vulnerability allows us to build a community of trust, caring, and belonging. The connections we build with one another become contagious. They grow and spread and infuse our larger church community with life and vitality.

## 1. WELCOME / INTRODUCTIONS :

Let's remember to **Silence cell phones! Speak up clearly, so all can hear.**

**Remind folks to let us know and to remind us if they have a hearing issue or if we aren't speaking up enough, so we can be aware.**

### • At FIRST SESSION of the series: Let's introduce ourselves:

"Tell us a bit about yourself, for example:"

- Your name, where you live and how long you've been in this area
- How long have you been a UU, coming to our church
- Your family, what you do (or did) for work, any special passions or hobbies  
(Model this by starting with yourself.)

**Distribute MISSION/COVENANT/CHECK IN handout.**

- **Read the MISSION statement orally - volunteers read COVENANT**
- **Remind folks to contact the facilitator if you are unable to come to a session** (if not included, give them your contact info. to add to their copy)
- **Read the CHECK-IN orally, in turn.**
- "Since time has been spent on introductions today (tonight), **we'll keep our check-in short**"; ex. "**Might you have a joy or feeling of gratitude you can share with us?**"

## 2. CHECK IN: (at 2nd and later sessions: repeat names again, if needed, and read the following aloud, as you choose):

*Check-in is a time to deepen our connections with each other by sharing joys, sorrows, challenges, and changes in our lives. Sharing is not required. Only share if you are comfortable. What is shared in group is confidential.*

Some **CHECK-IN PROMPTS:**

- *How have these past couple of weeks gone for you?*
- *Can you share some of your 'highs' and/or 'lows'?*
- *Has anything brought you a sense of gratitude or accomplishment? - of joy - or sorrow?*

## 3. OPENING: Use "chime" or bell to quiet folks; **LIGHT CANDLE:**

**(3 reading choices below, you might vary this from session to session)**

- *May "our separate fires kindle one flame" as we gather in this circle—bringing our stories, our reflections, our hopes and our struggles.  
May our candle flame lend light and promise for our time together.*  
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- *May we know once again that we are not isolated beings, but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe, to this community and to each other.*  
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- *May our time together bring learning, understanding, compassion, encouragement, and hope as we share about our life journeys and passions.*

**4. CENTERING:** *In preparation for our conversation, let's take a few moments to center ourselves and be thankful for this time we have together in community.*

*Please get comfortable, place both feet solidly on the floor, rest your hands on your thighs and let your shoulders drop. Gently close your eyes or focus on a spot a few feet in front of you on the floor. Bring your attention to the flow of your breath.*

*Breathing in I calm my body.  
Breathing out I smile.*

*Dwelling in this present moment,  
I know this is a wonderful moment.*

*Our life's path is not one we travel alone. We are in it together, and the company of spiritual friends helps us feel our interconnectedness.*

**Ring the chime:** *"Slowly open your eyes."*

**5. DISTRIBUTE READING:**

Ask for **volunteers** to **read the paragraphs aloud, in turn**. You might include a **pause after the reading**, to allow time to reflect before responding.

**6. POSE QUESTIONS** to prompt sharing, invite folks to respond if and as they choose; If you choose, you can **split readings into sections**, with questions/conversation as you go along (some readings are already done this way).

**Encourage silent spaces** between reflections; be comfortable with silence.

You might prompt: **"Take some time to think about that."** - or the like.

**FEEL FREE TO ADJUST or ADAPT THE QUESTIONS PROVIDED**

You may not get to all of them, or you may want to modify them slightly or skip around a bit, even make up a new question, depending on what comes up in the conversation, to keep it moving along.

**KEEPING YOUR GROUP ON TRACK:** If a group member should go on and on, or responds inappropriately so that **conversation needs redirection**, gently ask that they give others an opportunity to share or say something like:

- **"Let's reconsider the question"**
- **"Let's stop now and take a moment to reflect."**
- **"Thank you for sharing your thoughts. Now let's move on"**.

You can also make reference to the covenant.

*(If you are co-facilitating, work out a collaboration system with your partner, such as: when the other is facilitating, feel free to help guide the conversation, step in if you see a need to redirect.)*

**If the conversation has slowed down**, you as facilitator can model responses to help the conversation along. **Some prompts could be:**

- **What are your thoughts about that?**
- **Can you say more about that?**
- **How does it make you feel?**
- **What does it make you think of?**

If the topic is really not going well, turn it back to the group:

- **"What do you want to do with this topic?"**

**TOPIC READINGS start on next page:**

## WAKING UP WHITE

The invisibility of whiteness means that one doesn't have to notice that one is white. So there are people, and then there are black people. There are people and there are Latino people. And people—just people, just folks—turn out to be white, but we don't notice it.

White people have the luxury of not having to think about race. That is a benefit of being white, of being part of the dominant group. Just like men don't have to think about gender. The system works for you, and you don't have to think about it.

So they live in white space and then they don't have to think about it. First of all, they think about race as something that belongs to somebody else. The blacks have race; maybe Latinos have race; maybe Asians have race. But they're just white. They're just people. That's part of being white. ~ *John A. Powell*

*The paragraphs below are from the book: **Waking Up White: and Finding Myself in the Story of Race,** by Debbie Irving.*

Not so long ago, if someone had called me a racist, I would have kicked and screamed in protest. “But I’m a good person!” I would have insisted. “I don’t see color! I don’t have a racist bone in my body!” I would have felt insulted and misunderstood and stomped off to lick my wounds. That’s because I thought being a racist meant not liking people of color or being a name-calling bigot.

For years I struggled silently to understand race and racism. I had no way to make sense of debates in the media about whether the white guy was “being racist” or the black guy was “playing the race card.” I wanted close friends of color but kept ending up with white people as my closest friends. When I was with a person of color, I felt an inexplicable tension and a fear that I might say or do something offensive or embarrassing. When white people made blatantly racist jokes or remarks, I felt upset but had no idea what to do or say. I didn’t understand why, if laws supporting slavery, segregation, and discrimination had been abolished, lifestyles still looked so different across the color lines. Most confusing were unwanted racist thoughts that made me feel like a jerk. I felt too embarrassed to admit any of this which prevented me from going in search of answers.

It turns out, stumbling block number 1 was that I didn’t think I had a race, so I never thought to look within myself for answers. The way I understood it, race was for other people, brown and black skinned people. Don’t get me wrong – if you put a census form in my hand, I would know to check “white” or “Caucasian.” It’s more that I thought all those other categories, like Asian, African American, American Indian, and Latino, were the real races. I thought white was the raceless race – just plain, normal, the one against which all others were measured. This widespread phenomenon of white people wanting to guard themselves against appearing stupid, racist, or radical has resulted in an epidemic of silence from people who care deeply about justice and love for their fellow human beings. I believe most white people would take a stance against racism if only they knew how, or even imagined they had a role.

**Some Examples of White Privilege that you may have taken for granted if you're white are:**

- Being able to move into a new neighborhood and being fairly sure your neighbors will be pleasant to you and treat you with respect.
- Being able to watch a movie, read a book and open the front page of a newspaper and see yourself and your race widely represented and spoken for.
- Being able to seek legal, financial and medical help without having your race work against you.
- Never being told to, "get over slavery".
- Not having your name turned into an easier-to-say Anglo-Saxon name.
- Being able to fight racism one day, then ignore it the next.
- Being able to be articulate and well-spoken without people being surprised.
- Being pulled over or taken aside and knowing that you are not being singled out because of your race/color.
- Not having to teach your children to be aware of systematic racism for their own protection.
- Not having to be the only white person in the room and constantly assess the situation to make sure it's a safe one.
- Expecting the whole world to speak "your" language.
- Being able to ignore the consequences of race.

**QUESTIONS:**

- Can you give an example of a time when you caught yourself making a snap-judgment or assumption about someone based on their appearance (doesn't have to be race-related)? How did it feel when you caught yourself?
- How have you understood your race? What is your racial story?
- Have you ever tried to imagine what it would be like to live a life as someone of another race? If so, how did it feel?
- How have you measured your race compared to other races?
- How have you guarded yourself from appearing unaware, ignorant, racist or radical? When and how have you been silent?

**As CONVERSATION comes to an end, you might ask for last thoughts on the topic:**

*"Do you have a thought from this conversation that you will carry home with you?"*

**CLOSING WORDS on next page:**

## **CLOSING WORDS: TURNING TO ONE ANOTHER (by Margaret Wheatley)**

There is no greater power than a community discovering what it cares about.

Ask “What’s possible?” not “What’s wrong?” Keep asking.

Notice what you care about.

Assume that many others share your dreams.

Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.

Talk to people you know.

Talk to people you don’t know.

Talk to people you never talk to.

Be intrigued by the differences you hear.

Expect to be surprised.

Treasure curiosity more than certainty.

Invite in everybody who cares to work on what’s possible.

Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something.

Know that creative solutions come from new connections.

Remember, you don’t fear people whose story you know.

Real listening always brings people closer together.

Trust that meaningful conversations can change your words.

## **RING CHIME and EXTINGUISH CANDLE** (Choose one of these or one of your choice)

*As our time together comes to a close, we give thanks for one another, for the chance to share our lives, and to renew our spirits in the company of friends. May we go forth enriched by our gathering, committed to living life fully, to loving life with more passion, and to supporting one another.*

OR

*Remembering that the universe is so much larger than our ability to comprehend, let us go forth from this time together with the resolve to stop trying to reduce the incomprehensible to our own petty expectations, so that wonder -- that sense of what is sacred -- can find space to open up our minds and illumine our lives.*

## **ANNOUNCE NEXT SESSION’S TOPIC: (unless last session)**

**Ask for a volunteer to bring in a CLOSING reading (if needed) for this next session** (It can be something they particularly like, doesn’t necessarily have to relate to the topic.)

**if providing SNACKS, ask for a volunteer**