

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
Welcoming New Members: Our Transitions
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA
Plan for Facilitators October 2003

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting: from the Small Group Ministry Guidelines

We light this chalice to affirm the purpose of Small Group Ministry: to encourage people in their spiritual growth and help them develop relationships of substance and depth. These groups serve to enrich our community with the sort of personal sharing that doesn't happen much in our busy lives. Small Group Ministry provides a way to meet members' needs for worship, community, service, to grow spiritually and in understanding.

Ritual of Transition -- Thomas Mickelson & Rev. Jory Agate, adapted
(*Read around the circle, one line at a time.*)

Things change.
We change.
Our lives never stand still.
There is always something new.
We are always making transitions,
from one thing to another
one experience to another
one stage of life to another
one challenge to another.

Some transitions are easy,
Some are hard
Some seem almost impossible
Some are exciting and joyful,
Some are painful and frightening.
We change cities and homes.
We change jobs and activities.
We change commitments.
We even change our minds

At this moment
We pause to recognize our transitions
To add _____, _____, _____, _____ to our group
And to give thanks for this place
Where our transitions make a difference
Spiritual life is always in transition.
Beloved community is community in transition.
[Unison]

In anticipation of future transitions
We leave this chair empty,
Ready for new people,
New ideas,
New transitions.

Reflection/Personal Sharing/Prayer

Going around the circle, take one or two minutes to introduce yourself to the group. Place your object on the table, and explain its meaning. Your introduction may include information about how long you've been coming to the church, your children, your job, your hobbies, or any other facts you consider important.

Focus Reading:

Choice I: *Life Tides* by Elizabeth Tarbox

When I see you with worry on your brow and shadows in your eyes, and I say to you, "What's up?" remind me gently that I was not there when you made that journey to the center of your soul. Tell me as kindly as you can that I am sleeping when night clutches at you and you are driven to a place in your heart which is ever night. Do not let me say, "Don't worry," when worry is all you know and it feels as if worry is all you'll ever know.

For none of us ever really walks in another's shoes or knows the innermost rooms of a person's heart. None of us truly knows the lonely places of another's journey or the causes of the lines around another's eyes. Therefore, let us be gentle with one another. Let us listen more than we speak and accept more than we judge. Let our open, outstretched hands reach and touch that we may walk along together for a little while in friendship and in trust.

Choice II: From *Transitions* by William Bridges

"Transition [is] the natural process of disorientation and reorientation that marks the turning points of the path of growth. Throughout nature, growth involves periodic accelerations and transformations: Things go slowly for a time and nothing seems to change—until suddenly the eggshell cracks, the branch blossoms the tadpole's tail shrinks away, the leaf falls, the bird molts, the hibernation begins. With us it is the same. Although the signs are less clear...the functions of transition times are the same." (p. 5)

"There are ways of facilitating transitions.... They involve seeing transition itself in a new light and understanding the various phases of the transition experience. They involve developing new skills for negotiating the perilous passage across the 'nowhere' that separates the old life situation from the new. (p. 14)

Focus Questions:

What have been some of the major transitions in your life?

What did you learn from them?

What helped you get through them?

How do you feel about them now?

What do you do to facilitate transitions?

What if any relationship do you see between transitions and spiritual growth?

Checkout/Likes & Wishes

(This is the time for facilitators to ask participants what they liked about this meeting and what they might wish for future meetings. This is also the time for any discussion of logistics.)

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice

Choice I: from Annie Dillard

We are here to abet creation
and to witness to it,
to notice each other's beautiful face
and complex nature
so that creation need not play
to an empty house.

Choice II: Anonymous

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.

Choice III: From T.S. Eliot in "Little Gidding" V in *Four Quartets*

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.