

Circle Ministry Session Plan

What is sacred?

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 (1 minute)

Opening words (1 minute)

Sacred time

Sacred space

Sacred rites

Sacred love

Sacred cows

Sacredsay it, whatever it is for you that carries meaning right down into your toes.

No one has to tell you, "This is sacred. This isn't sacred."

Your heart knows, its own kind of knowing.

Listen, listen.

Don't expect answers.

Don't expect clarity.

Anticipate only the amazing grace of recognition, sacred knowing.

As we gather in this ministry of circles, may our meeting give voice to the sacred among us. It is here, right here.

Check-in/Sharing (3-4 minutes@ - 30-40 minutes)

Discussion (60 minutes)

[See Circle Ministry Session Sequence as a reminder of the structure of this segment.]

First response

Cross-conversation

Topic: What is sacred?

As we ponder the sacred, consider the many names by which it is known—holy, wondrous, mysterious, amazing, , transcendent, life-giving, blessed, God even What is it for each of us that we experience as sacred? What is it that we worship, not just in the setting of a worship service, but in moments private and public, solemn and jubilant, remembered and fading into memory's rafters, accessible and evasive, extraordinary and utterly commonplace?

Consider the 300-year-old words of Father Jean-Pierre de Caussade, a French Jesuit priest who offers this slant on the sacred:

“God is telling you, dear sisters and brothers,
That if you abandon all restraints,
Carry your wishes to their farthest limits,
Open your heart boundlessly,
There is not a single moment when you will not be shown
Everything you can possibly wish for.

....Souls who can recognize God
 In the most trivial,
 The most grievous and the most mortifying things
 That happen to them in their lives,
 Honour everything equally with delight and rejoicing,
 And welcome with open arms
 What others dread and avoid.”

Take a few moments of silence and ponder your responses to these questions:

1. What is “your sacred?” Describe an experience, a moment, a place, a person perhaps, that in the course of your living, you have recognized as holding the quality of the sacred.
2. Tell a story of when you have been utterly surprised by an experience that you could never have anticipated would be felt as sacred, but in memory you know it was. What was revealed that couldn’t have been revealed in any other way by this experience?

(Read through both 1 and 2 and choose for discussion the questions that best fit your group.)

[See Circle Ministry Session Sequence for clarification of this next segment.]

First response

Cross-conversation

Concluding statements

What concluding thoughts would you like to share?

Feedback (15 minutes)

Thank the group. Ask what they liked in this session and what variations they would hope for.

Explain that for the next session, we’ll consider the topic, “Our Bodies, Ourselves.”

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

Closing (1 minute)

I offer you the words of Joyce Poley:

When our heart is in a holy place,
 When our heart is in a holy place
 We are bless’d with love and amazing grace,
 When our heart is in a holy place.

When we tell our story from deep inside,
 And we listen with a loving mind,
 And we see our faces in each other’s eyes,
 Then our heart is in a holy place.

Go in love. Go in peace.

Circle Ministry Session Sequence for Facilitators

First Parish Unitarian Universalist – Cohasset

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!