

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
CCUU Covenant Group Session:
What it Means to Serve
Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist, Palatine, IL

Pre-Meeting Preparation

At the end of the previous session, or sometime before this session, give to group members the preparation page for this session (attached at the end of this document.)

Preliminaries

Chalice Lighting and Reading

"To Be of Use"

I want to be with people who submerge in the task

Who go into the fields to harvest and work in a row and pass the bags along,

Who stand in the line and haul in their places,

Who are not parlor generals and field deserters but move in a common rhythm when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud. Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.

But the thing worth doing well done has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.

Greek amphoras for wine or oil, Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums but you know they were made to be used.

The pitcher cries out for water to carry and a person for work that is real.

Marge Piercy -- Singing the Living Tradition #567

Check-in.

Transition Meditation

Help the group move from check-in preliminaries to silence with directed deep breathing, soft words, music, or other meditative techniques.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

1. When in your life have you felt served? What was it and what did it feel like? Can you tell that story?

2. Think about times in your life when you've served. Did you receive pleasure in pleasing or helping others? When did you do something good in order to avoid having a bad feeling, or so that others wouldn't think badly of you?
3. Do you believe there's such a thing as "pure" motivation?
- 4.. Sometimes people resent being helped. Have you experienced that?
5. In the UU tradition, there is no authority telling us that we must be charitable, "or else." So why is service so important to UUs?

Finalizing our Service Project

Resume discussion of the service project in light of the evening's discussion. Come to closure on what it will be. If you can't, ask for a volunteer coordinator and one or two others to work it with the group by email before the next meeting.

Check-out

Closing Reading/Extinguishing the Chalice

If, here, you have found freedom, take it with you into the world.
If you have found comfort, go and share it with others.
If you have dreamed dreams, help one another, they may come true!
If you have known love, give some back to a bruised and hurting world.
Go in peace.

Lauralyn Bellamy -- Singing the Living Tradition #692

So May We Be.

Participant Preparation for Session: What it Means to Serve

Food for Thought

Doing for others. Giving back. Altruism. Self-sacrifice. Giving rather than receiving. Responsibility. Duty. Gift. Guilt. Helping hands. "Other" focused. Unselfish. The list of thoughts, feelings, and states of being goes on and on when you try to describe what it means to "serve" others. Our UU principles proclaim the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and call for justice, equity, and compassion in human relationships. Our own congregational covenant promises that we will strive together toward these principles through worship, study, and **service**.

Service seems like a basic, simple concept—we help someone or some group. But it is actually quite complex spiritually, emotionally, and culturally—for both the server and those being

served. Just think of all the historical meanings around the word “servant” and you begin to sense the larger issues. We’ll be discussing that complexity at our next meeting. Meanwhile, you might want to do some thinking about these questions:

1. When in your life have you felt served? What was it and what did it feel like? Can you tell that story?
2. Think about times in your life when you’ve served. Did you receive pleasure in pleasing or helping others? When did you do something good in order to avoid having a bad feeling, or so that others wouldn’t think badly of you?
3. Do you believe there’s such a thing as “pure” motivation?
- 4.. Sometimes people resent being helped. Have you experienced that?
5. In the UU tradition, there is no authority telling us that we must be charitable, “or else.” So why is service so important to UUs?

Meditation Reading

Excerpts from “Awareness,” a retreat talk and book by Anthony de Mello. DeMello was a citizen of India, raised in Spain, educated at the University of Chicago, a Jesuit priest, a board certified psychologist, and founder of the Sadhana Center for Pastoral Counseling in Poona, India. His work was informed by Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, psychology, sociology, and his own spiritual thinking. It is challenging, to say the least!

The Masquerade of Charity

Charity is really self-interest masquerading under the form of altruism. You say this it is very difficult to accept that there may be times when you are not honest to goodness really trying to be loving or trustful. Let me simplify it. Let’s make it as simple as possible. Let’s even make it as blunt and extreme as possible, at least to begin with.

There are three types of selfishness. The first type is the one where I give myself the pleasure of pleasing myself. That’s what we generally call self-centeredness. The second is when I give myself the pleasure of pleasing others. That would be a more refined kind of selfishness. Don’t take pride in that. Don’t think you’re a great person. You’re a very ordinary person, but you’ve got refined tastes! Then you’ve got the third type: when you do something good so that you won’t get a bad feeling. More on that later.

The first type of selfishness is very obvious, but the second one is hidden, very hidden, and for that reason more dangerous, because we get to feel that we’re really great. But maybe we’re not all that great after all. You protest when I say that. That’s great!

You, madam, say that, in your case, you live alone, and go to the church and give several hours of your time each day. But you also admit you're doing it for a selfish reason—you need to be needed—and you also know you need to be needed in a way that makes you feel like you're contributing to the world a little bit. But you also claim that, because they also need you to do this, it's a two-way street.

You're almost enlightened! We've got to learn from you. That's right. She is saying, "I give something, I get something." She is right. I go out to help, I give something, I get something. That's beautiful. That's true. That's real. That isn't charity, that's enlightened self-interest.

You know the inner pleasure you have while doing acts of charity. It's the opposite of someone who says, "What's so great about what I did? I did something. I got something. I had no notion I was doing anything good. My left hand had no idea what my right hand was doing." You are never so good as when you have no consciousness that you're good. Or, as the great Sufi would say, "A saint is one until he or she knows it."

I'm not saying that there's no such thing as pure motivation. I'm saying that ordinarily everything we do is in our self-interest. Everything. When we do something for the love of God, is that selfishness? Yes. When you're doing something for the love of anybody, it is in your self-interest. But when you're acting out of love—and not guilt—you do things for people and it's pleasurable. Wonderful! You're a healthy individual because you're *self-interested*. That's healthy.

There are some people who do things so that they won't have to have a bad feeling. They act out of guilt, not love. They act out of fear. It doesn't give you a good feeling to do it; it gives you a bad feeling to do it. You hate it. You're making loving sacrifices but you're grumbling. If I had a dollar for every time I did things that gave me a bad feeling, I'd be a millionaire by now. We want people to think well of us. We don't want to hurt people's feelings because *we'll* be hurt. Ah, there it is. If we do the hurting, others will have a bad opinion of us. They won't like us, they'll talk against us and we don't like that! That's the worst kind of charity, when you're doing something so you won't get a bad feeling. You don't have the guts to say no, to say you want to be left alone.