

Facilitator Notes for Caring Community

Preparation for this final meeting

There are three considerations for the facilitator – an introduction to the time of silence, a special Shared Reading where members go around the circle reading a paragraph at a time, and a Closing Circle activity where members read brief descriptions they have written about each person.

- Read over the Silence introduction and the Shared Reading to acquaint yourself with them.
- Prepare the material for the Closing Circle. You will be given several interlocking puzzle pieces that fit together, one for each group member plus 1 for errors. Before the meeting, write each person's name on the front of a puzzle piece (the colored side). Then, on the back of the piece, write a characteristic or quality that you admire about that person.
- Note the **Script** at the end of the facilitator notes. It is passed around to read in the Closing Circle.

As participants arrive

- As group members come in, ask them to write a characteristic or quality they appreciate about each member on the back of that member's puzzle piece. (*Members also do Words of the Day*).
- When all pieces are filled out, put the pieces on the table next to the chalice and connect them together to make a whole.

The Gathering

Words of the Day

My experience of a caring community includes ...

Chalice Lighting

We light this chalice to shine on our time together. In its light we celebrate the relationships and understanding we are creating in this place and time. May our sharing be deep. (*Light chalice*)

The Basket

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence Introduction

Read: For our time of silence, we will think with deep gratitude about each person in our covenant group. Each person has brought a special light to this group, a spark, a special gift.

Listen to these words by Albert Schweitzer.

At times, our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person.

Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.

As we sit quietly in this circle, visualize each person around the circle. Be aware of your deep gratitude for their special gifts, their spark of light. (*Silence for 2 minutes*)

Come back to this place now.

Shared Reading

I Want to Be With People, by Dana E. Worsnop

Facilitator: We will read it going around the circle, with breaks at

Often people say that they love coming to a place with so many like-minded people.
I know just what they are getting at – and I know that they aren't getting it quite right.
.....

I don't want to be with a bunch of people who think just like me.
.....

I want to be in a beloved community where I don't have to think like everyone else to be loved, to be eligible for salvation.

I want to be with people who value compassion, justice, love and truth, though they have different thoughts and opinions about all sorts of things.
.....

I want to be with independent-minded people of good heart.

I want to be with people who have many names and no name at all for God.
.....

I want to be with people who see in me goodness and dignity, who also see my failings and foibles, and who still love me.

I want to be with people who feel their inter-connection with all existence and let it guide their footfalls upon the earth.
.....

I want to be with people who see life as a paradox and don't always rush to resolve it.

I want to be with people who are willing to walk the tight rope that is life and who will hold my hand as I walk mine.
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I want to be with people who let church call them into a different way of being in the world.

I want to be with people who support, encourage and even challenge each other to higher and more ethical living.
.....

I want to be with people who inspire one another to follow the call of the spirit.

I want to be with people who covenant to be honest, engaged and kind, who strive to keep their promises and hold me to the promises I make.
.....

I want to be with people who give of themselves, who share their hearts and minds and gifts.

I want to be with people who know that human community is often warm and generous, sometimes challenging and almost always a grand adventure.
.....

In short, I want to be with people like you.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round 1: Share your reflections on caring community and the preparation materials.

Round 2: Share feelings and thoughts on our current covenant group.

Closing Circle

Say: In our time together we have become a strong group, connecting with one another by trust, shared experiences, deep sharing and deep listening. Today we honor our group as it has been. We have grown together on many levels. We all fit together and create the whole. We have become a sacred whole.

Pull apart one individual puzzle piece. Read the scripted sentence (found at the bottom of this page) to the person named on the puzzle piece. (You are also reading the descriptions on the back). Then give that person their puzzle piece.

Ask the person next to you continue and give them the script. This person should get the puzzle piece and read the script, including the characteristics on the back of the puzzle piece. Continue around the circle to the left until all the pieces have been used. End by saying something like, "Blessed be" Or "Go in peace."

Extinguishing the Chalice

We extinguish this flame and we remember the warmth of our community, the light of our wisdom, the generosity of our sharing. We keep these in our heart until we meet again.
(*Extinguish the chalice.*)

Song/Chime

Script for reading a puzzle piece:

 Name , you have been a valuable member of this group. Here is what you have brought to the group. You are ... (*read qualities written on back of puzzle piece*) ...
Thank you for bringing your gifts to our group.

Preparation for Caring Community

Many Unitarian Universalists are familiar with the expression “beloved community.” In a large church congregation, small groups can help members participate in activities that fit the personality and needs of individuals plus the congregation’s needs for members’ engagement. An atmosphere fostering openness allows group members to care for themselves and others and acts as a foundation for support and accountability for our faith journeys.

The UUA, at both the national and local levels, has faced the same problems which arise in many organizations (recruiting a diverse group of members, creating a sense of belonging for all, and working together for a common cause). We must embody the spirit of welcoming espoused in the “Welcoming Congregation” designation and create worship services, rituals and activities that are based on the principles that bind us as a congregation and faith community. The covenant groups are intentionally working toward creating a safe space where individuals can be and share themselves with others to discuss common themes in a way that enriches our lives and calls to our larger selves.

M. Scott Peck, in *The Different Drum, Community Making and Peace*, defines community using three essential characteristics: Inclusiveness, Realism and Contemplation. His interpretation of “inclusive” includes sexes, races and creeds, but also different expressions of human emotions, personality and lifestyles. The wider perspectives gained through sharing of our talents and human failings help the group to view situations realistically. Communities actively striving for self-awareness plan times for contemplation and reflection, hold members accountable, and stick together on their journey.

One of the marvelous things about community is that it enables us to welcome and help people in a way we couldn't as individuals. When we pool our strength and share the work and responsibility, we can welcome many people, even those in deep distress, and perhaps help them find self-confidence and inner healing. *Jean Vanier, Community And Growth*

Properly speaking, global thinking is not possible... Look at one of those photographs of half the earth taken from outer space, and see if you recognize your neighborhood. The right local questions and answers will be the right global ones. The Amish question “What will this do to our community?” tends toward the right answer for the world. *Wendell Berry*

All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Community is a place where the connections felt in our hearts make themselves known in the bonds between people, and where the tuggings and pullings of those bonds keep opening our hearts. *Parker J. Palmer*

Religious communities have historically been designed to counteract the forces of alienation. That's why so many successful social movements have relied upon the strength of spiritual communities and a large base of their organizing has been through them. *Tim DeChristopher*

To “listen” another’s soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another. *Douglas Steere*

We are all longing to go home to some place we have never been ... Community. Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. *Starhawk*

Buddhas continue to live on through their teachings as dharma bodies. Their spirits become manifest in the sangha (spiritual community) where their teachings are passed on. *Shinjo Ito*

People come to church longing for, yearning for, hoping for...a sense of roots, place, belonging, sharing and caring. People come to a church with a search for community, not committee. *Kennon Callahan*

Questions to Ponder

1. How does the UU 7th principle: “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part,” fit into your definition of community?
2. What communities have you been a part of that have fulfilled your need for a sense of belonging in ways you were able to be and share yourself?
3. What part does listening play in your ability to bond with others through small group activities?
4. How does your participation in local communities affect change on a larger scale? How do your personal relationships affect your ability to participate in community groups?

Questions about our Covenant Group

1. What is something you appreciate about this covenant group?
2. What are insights and gifts of wisdom you’ve found during the year in yourself ... from others in the group?
3. What characteristics of this group have you noticed that support bonding of individuals into a community?

Words of the Day

Before coming to the gathering, think of a few words, phrases, or metaphors that describe your experience of a caring community. The prompt for the Words of the Day activity will be to complete this sentence: “My experience of a caring community includes ... ”

**In addition, be prepared to name a characteristic or quality you admire for each member of the group.

Gathering for Caring Community

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The Basket

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings *I Want to Be With People, by Dana E. Worsnop*

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Song/Chime

Announcements

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to let the facilitator know if I will be absent or need to quit
- to share with the facilitator the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to do the reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others
- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, giving advice, or advocating a specific view
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn and to stay on the “I-message.”