

**Chalice Circle Session Plans
2011 – 2012
Kitsap Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**

**Topics Suggested by
The Small Group Ministry**

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Introduction

Thank you for volunteering to serve as a Chalice Circle Facilitator! Chalice Circles strengthen and sustain our community in multiple ways.

- Chalice Circles promote “Numerical Growth.” By providing opportunities for individual people to find friends, opportunities for growth, and emotional and spiritual support, the Chalice Circles help people get “hooked in” and feel a part of our community. They stay, they join, and our congregation grows in numbers.
- Chalice Circles promote “Organic Growth,” defined as the “task of building the community, fashioning the organizational structures, developing the processes and practices that result in a dependable, stable network of human relationships in which we can grow and from which we can make a difference.” Because facilitators meet regularly with the minister, Chalice Circles are a key link in our communications. As a facilitator, you become a two-way bridge, bringing information from church leadership to the people in your group, and bringing concerns, feelings, pastoral issues, and other key information from the members of your group to the leadership, so that we can fine tune our ministries to best meet the needs of the largest number of people.
- Chalice Circles promote “Incarnational Growth,” which comes as we live our values more fully. The primary institutional vehicle for Incarnational Growth are the service projects. Chalice Circles have done amazing things for our congregation, both by meeting internal needs, and by raising our public profile. Individual incarnational growth happens whenever an internal shift manifests in an external change of behavior.
- Chalice Circles promote “Maturational Growth,” the progress that individual members make in their own faith journeys. Spiritual maturation happens at all stages of life, and involves a continual, spiral process of “deepening spirituality,” a capacity to be present to and find meaning in life’s ups and downs, and to affirm its essential sacredness, and “expansion of the spiritual imagination,” the ability to see life as a series of complex, interrelated choices, rather than as a black-and-white, yes-or-no, right-or-wrong march down a straight and narrow path. Chalice Circles provide an accepting and caring atmosphere and opportunities for reflection, listening, and learning our way along that spiral process.

Of course, the hope is that all facilitators also experience personal growth and satisfaction, and have a lot of fun, too. Again, thank you for agreeing to serve!

How Chalice Circles Work

Here's the format for each Chalice Circle meeting:

Opening Reading. Something will be chosen that gathers the group together and creates sacred space. The reading will inspire a sense of shared values, and possibly allude to (though not introducing) the discussion topic. A Chalice is lighted. You can use the reading provided, find your own, or invite participants to take turns finding and sharing readings.

Opening Check-In. Each person, in turn, speaks for a few minutes, without interruption or cross-talk about the concerns of his/her life. Ask, "What's on your heart?" Other ideas might be "What do you have on your mind today?" or "What do you need to leave behind for a couple of hours in order to be fully present?"

The Discussion. With an emphasis on sharing and listening rather than debate, the group discusses a topic.

The Business. The group makes plans for whatever service project it has committed itself to and/or tends to other logistical details.

Closing Check-Out. Each person, in turn, speaks for 1 minute or less about how he/she is feeling as the meeting draws to an end. Good questions to ask are: "Did you get to say what you wanted to say?" "Did the process within our group encourage or discourage your participation?" "Did you feel listened to?" If the topic was a difficult one to discuss, what made it so?

Closing Reading. Brief reading that sends people on their way and celebrates community, and possibly alludes to the discussion topic. Again, use the one provided, find another you like better, or invite group participation. The Chalice is extinguished.

At the first meeting, the group should discuss the covenant. It is not important to follow the suggested covenant (below), but it IS important to have a shared understanding. People must agree to abide by the covenant, and to hold themselves and one another accountable. When a new member joins the group, the covenant should be revisited. This serves to reinforce group norms within the group, as well as creating a sense of safety and trust.

Discussion Tips

Chalice Circles aren't support groups or discussion groups. They fall somewhere in between; where they fall will depend primarily on the makeup of your particular group. Because some people are there for connection and other people are there for content, it's important to keep a balance between personal sharing (check-in) and discussion. If there is a member in crisis, it may be right and appropriate to devote an entire session to offering support and caring.

On the other hand, it may be best to set a clear boundary: "I am so concerned for you, and feel as if you need more support than we can give you right now. If it's okay, we're going to move on now, but after we're finished, let's you and I sit down and I'll help you get connected with the people who can give you the help you need. (Then follow through, by helping them make an appointment with the minister, connect with the Lay Pastoral Ministry Team, or contact the Caring Committee.)

We provide multiple discussion questions so that you can choose the one that will initiate the best conversation. There's no need to answer them all! You can pick the questions that you think will jump-start the best discussion, you can read the questions and let people choose the questions to answer, either as individuals or as a group, or you can make up questions on the fly. Trust your instincts as a facilitator.

Suggested Covenant

Together, we covenant to:

1. Attend each meeting, or contact the facilitator if we are unable to attend.
2. Begin and end on time, or let someone know if we need to be late or leave early.
3. Treat each other with respect and love—listening without interrupting, discussing without arguing, speaking our own truth without needing it to be the **ONLY** truth—in the context of a caring relationship. We do not have to think alike to love alike.
4. Ensure that all members participate equally and fully, and that sharing is held in confidence until and unless permission is given to share more widely.
5. Adopt a service project to benefit the church community or the larger community.
6. Actively recruit and welcome new members, and to divide when the group reaches 12 people (the empty chair is symbolic of this openness).
7. Share responsibility for our group's health and value, by speaking up when we feel one of these covenants has been violated, or even revising these.

The Service Project

Working together on a mutually agreed upon service project is a key element of the chalice circle experience. Nothing bonds a group like working side by side.

Your group may want their project to benefit the wider community. Some of our Chalice Circles have formed partnerships with community organizations (e.g. El Centro de Familia, Port Orchard's Family Kitchen, Relay for Life, etc.) Others have found particular projects to do (e.g. cleaning up trash along the side of the road, pulling ivy in a state park.)

Your group may prefer to help out the Fellowship. We certainly need all the help we can get. Some groups take on tasks around the fellowship (decorating for Celebration Sunday, cleaning up the Memorial Garden, hosting or leading a Sunday Service, helping with a mailing.)

Some groups decide to do multiple service projects over the course of the year. But if your group prefers to do only one, a tentative calendar might look like this:

October: Discuss the reasoning behind the service project. Invite people to think of possibilities.

November: Brainstorm list.

December: Let things "simmer." The holidays are busy enough already.

January: Revisit the list. Narrow it down to 2-3 possibilities. Task people with researching the details of those possibilities.

February: Make the final determination. Schedule your service project for some time in the spring.

Though you are liable to have a group full of very busy people, don't let this slide unless you absolutely must. Research has shown that the service component is a key element of successful small group ministries.

Trouble Shooting

The best place to bring any troubles or concerns is the monthly facilitator's meeting. We typically begin these meetings by sharing how things are going in our respective Circles. Common problems and solutions that may come up:

- If one person is dominating the conversation, be pro-active. Don't be afraid to interrupt, kindly. "Joe, I really like what you're saying, but I want to make sure we hear from everybody."
- If someone says or does something inappropriate, speak up. "I am not okay with what just happened. I feel like we're in violation of our covenant. Does anyone else feel that way?"
- If someone misses a meeting and doesn't contact you within a couple of days, REACH OUT. They might have a crisis in their life and need support. "Hi, we missed you at our last Chalice Circle meeting. Is everything okay?"
- If your group is at 12 members and people don't want to split, well, you're not alone. Other groups have found creative solutions (meeting in the same building in two different rooms, for example.) But the bottom line is that it gets really hard to have a good conversation with more than 12 people. Make sure, when the group splits, that there are enough people in each group to feel "at home" and, perhaps, find opportunities for reunions.

Chalice Circle Shopping

Because Chalice Circles tend to vary a great deal depending on the people involved, newcomers need to be empowered to find a good 'fit.' As a facilitator, your responsibility is to help a newcomer get to the group, make them feel welcome, and then follow up with them before the next meeting to find out whether they'd like to join. If they are ready, THEN introduce the subject of the covenant.

Extra Materials and “Going Off Script”

You are not required to use the materials provided. These are a tool for you, designed to make your job as a facilitator easier. However, if they are not working well for your group, feel free to supplement with other materials occasionally. How might that work within the framework of Chalice Circles?

- You can choose a member of the group to bring opening and closing readings each week, rotating through the entire Circle.
- You can talk about another topic of special interest to your group, or choose to discuss previous sermons.
- You can extend the check-in period once in a while, or even choose one or two people to share the story of their lives in depth each week.
- You can take advantage of the free small group sessions available on the UU Small Group Ministry Network’s website (www.smallgroupministry.net)

However, it is a good idea to get agreement from the group before making any of these changes.

Socializing!!

Some of our chalice circles like getting together a couple of times of the course of the year for a purely social occasion, and inviting the families. This is HIGHLY ENCOURAGED, schedules permitting.

Chalice Circle Session Plans 2011 – 2012 Kitsap Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

The following topics are ones that everyone has had experience with, and can provide the substance for good conversations and sharing. They have been excerpted from the Small Group Ministry website.

- Session 1 Getting Acquainted
- Session 2 If You Could Invite Three People . . .
- Session 3 How Do You Find Peace Within Yourself?
- Session 4 Gossip
- Session 5 Acceptance and Challenges
- Session 6 If You Were to Win the Lottery . . .
- Session 7 Hope
- Session 8 Can You Come Out and Play?
- Session 9 Individuality and Community
- Session 10 Humor
- Session 11 The Carpet Bag
- Session 12 The Bucket List
- Session 13 Faith
- Session 14 Leading and Following
- Session 15 Pray, Meditate, Contemplate
- Session 16 Creating Paradise
- Session 17 Creating and Destroying
- Session 18 Tradition and Innovation
- Session 19 Holding On and Letting Go
- Session 20 Belonging

Getting Acquainted

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words

Come into this circle of community. Come into this sacred space.

Be not tentative. Bring your whole self!

Bring the joy that makes your heart sing.

Bring your kindness and your compassion.

Bring also your sorrow, your pain.

Bring your brokenness and your disappointments.

In the spirit of love and mystery; may we recognize the unique spark that resides within each of us.

May we know the joy of wholeness.

May we know the joy of being together.

...Adapted from Andrew Pakula

Check-In: What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing.

Reading:

Many people and religious traditions have written and taught that life involves many polarities and paradoxes, both within an individual and within groups. These polarities are said to be differences and preferences to be recognized and managed, rather than problems to be solved. Each end of the polarity has its own advantages and value, as well as disadvantages and liabilities. In our session we will be exploring some of the polarities that exist and sharing some of our attempts at finding balance living with polarities, embracing “both and” rather than “either/or”.

Discussion Questions: (Give a piece of paper and pencil to each person and allow a few minutes for people to make notes before sharing.)

1. What would you like to share about yourself with the group, including if you wish, where you are on your life journey and what is particularly important to you at this time.
2. If you wish, please share what polarities are particularly prominent for you at this time?
3. What do you want to get from being in the group and what do you want to offer to the group?

Check-Out

Closing Words:

We give thanks for the gifts of each other’s sharing. We say “Thank you for risking your story. Thank you for creating a place of safety. Thank you for listening with appreciation as we deepen our knowing of one another through the weeks to come.”

... Adapted from “Gatherings” by Tony Bushman & Bill Hamilton-

Holway

Extinguish the Chalice (option of some additional closing ritual per group agreement such as holding hands, group hug, bow to each other, or other ritual).

(Lesson by UU Church in Eugene, OR, October 2009)

If You Could Invite Three People . . .

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words

What riches we carry inside us:

Living memories of teachers we have known,

Authors we have read,

Friends whose presence never failed to comfort us,

Authors, poets, even politicians, who never failed to inspire us,

Parents, siblings, aunts or uncles,

Whose values and caring sustains us still.

What could they tell us about life?

What would they share that would further open our hearts and minds?

Who would you invite to our small group?

Check-In: What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing.

Discussion Question: If you could invite 3 people, from any time, whether or not you have ever met them, to our small group, who would they be – and why would you choose them to join us?

Check-Out

Closing Words:

“May you be blessed with good friends,

And learn to be a good friend to yourself,

Journeying to that place in your soul where

There is love, warmth, and feeling.

May this change you.

. . .

May you treasure your friends.

May you be good to them, be there for them

And receive all the challenges, truth and light you need.”

. . . *John O’Donohue from “To Bless the Space Between*

us”

Extinguish the Chalice

(Lesson 2 by Glenn Turner, First UU Church, Auburn, ME)

How Do You Find Peace Within Yourself?

Chalice Lighting

Opening Reading

Not the peace of a cease-fire
Nor even the vision of the wolf and the lamb,
But rather
As in the heart when excitement is over
And you can talk only about a great weariness.
I know that I know how to kill, that makes me an adult.
And my son plays with a toy gun that knows
how to open and close its eyes and say Mama.
A peace
Without the big noise of beating swords into ploughshares,
Without words, without
The thud of the heavy rubber stamp; let it be
light, floating, like lazy white foam.
A little rest for the wounds – who speaks of healing?
(And the howl of the orphans is passed from one generation
to the next, as in a relay race:
the baton never falls.)
 Let it come
 Like wildflowers,
 Suddenly, because the field
 Must have it: wildpeace

. . . Yehuda Amichai

Check-In

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe a time when you have felt fully at peace with yourself and the world.
2. What are the internal barriers you put in place that keep you from finding peace within your heart?
3. What are the barriers to peace in our world? What can we do to bring the barriers down?

Check-Out

Closing Words:

When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of the wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of the still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

. . . Wendell Berry

Extinguish the Chalice

(Lesson 3 by Rev. Liz Stevens, 2006-2007)

Gossip

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

“If you haven’t got anything nice to say about anybody, come sit next to me.”
. . . Alice Roosevelt Longworth

Check-In: What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing.

Readings:

Gossip is both the act of spreading news from person to person, especially rumors and private information and the news spread through the act of gossiping. While this is one of the oldest and (still) the most common means of spreading and sharing information, it is also notorious for the introduction of errors and other variations into the information thus transmitted. The term also carries implications that the news so transmitted is of, usually, a personal or trivial nature. . . .
Wikipedia

Gossip is something we all have experience of. It is a form of communication that has been embraced by our cultures, starting in our schoolyards and continuing on to our senior years. Since it is so prevalent in our interactions it must serve a purpose or role. Yet, it often causes harm or pain in its execution. As such we openly disparage and proclaim to reject the practice of gossiping. Thus far we do not seem to have found methods to stop gossip or transform it into healthy communication. Perhaps we do not have the inclination or the tools.

“The Puritan’s idea of hell is a place where everybody has to mind his own business.” *Wendell Phillips*

“Whoever gossips to you will gossip about you.” *Spanish Proverb*

“Show me someone who never gossips, and I’ll show you someone who isn’t interested in people.” *Barbara Walters*

“Gossip needn’t be false to be evil – there’s a lot of truth that shouldn’t be passed around.”
Frank A. Clark.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do we gossip? What purpose does it serve?
2. Is all gossip negative? Can we gossip in a positive way?
3. Is gossip something that we can stop? What could we replace it with?
4. Is gossip a necessary part of human interactions?

Check-Out

Closing Words:

“So live that you wouldn’t be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip.” *Will Rogers*

(Lesson 4 by Kara Sweeney, Unitarian Universalist Metro Atlanta North – May, 2005)

Acceptance and Challenges

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

We need one another when things happen in our lives over which we lack influence. We need loving reassurance of the worth of our being.

We need one another when we are spared from harm. We need to feel our gratitude with wonder and without guilt.

We need one another when we are called upon to make decisions that are contrary to another's thoughts or well-being. We need compassion for the situation and for ourselves.

We need one another when we hear of tragedies not directly related to us. We need to feel the oneness with humanity.

In all of these things, we need one another.

. . . *Helen Zidowecki*

Check-In

Readings:

So what is really the path of healing? It can begin in this moment, by embracing the life that's here. Because if we can begin to bring a sense of peace and care to the life inside us, naturally the circles widen to include other people. It's the way of the heart – if we can be kind towards ourselves we'll be kind towards others – When some people talk about accepting themselves they have this fear that they're condoning some bad behavior or that if they accept themselves, that means they'll never improve. But in the moment of accepting, we're not condoning. We're just acknowledging the truth of the next moment, be a lot wiser. One of the great psychologists, Carl Rogers, put it this way, "It wasn't until I accepted myself just as I was in this moment, that I was free to change." So a pre-condition to true transformation, is to accept ourselves in the moment.

. . . *adapted from interview with Tara Brach,*

PhD.

Within the church we need to love people as they are, warts and all, AND we need to help them become more devoted, generous, compassionate, faithful people. . . . *Roy M. Oswald and Barry Johnson*

The job of the newspaper is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. . . *Finley P. Dunn*

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe a situation where there was a challenge balancing acceptance of what is, and of wanting things to be different. What has been helpful, or not, for dealing with this polarity/paradox/dilemma?
2. Tell about a time when you gave up the struggle against something that could not be changed. How did you feel?
3. Describe a time when you did not accept something as it was, worked toward change, and found it satisfying and rewarding. What gave you the energy or hope to work for that change?
4. Describe your experience trying to balance the polarity of acceptance and nurture with challenge and transformation in a church community, other group, or family.

Check-Out

Closing Words:

As we leave this community of the spirit, may we remember the difficult lesson that each day offers more things than we can do. May we do what needs to be done, postpone what does not, and be at peace with what we can be and do. Therefore, may we learn to separate that which matters most, and that which matters least of all.

. . . Adapted from Richard S. Gilbert

Extinguish the Chalice

(Lesson 5 from UU Church in Eugene, OR. March, 2010)

If You Were to Win the Lottery. .

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

“When the jackpot gets as big as it is right now, inevitably the talk around the office turns to “What would you do if you won the lottery?” “I’ve given this some thought over the years and I don’t believe anyone who says their “life won’t change much” or that they are “going to stay at their current job”. If you didn’t want your life to change why were you playing the lottery in the first place? Trust me, I love my job but if I win the lottery I will be putting in my notice in a hurry. Having a job, at least the first year after winning, won’t be conducive to my new found freedom. I don’t think Shelly would like it if I took a month off twice a year to go on vacation. My life will change, but will it change for the better is the question. Either, I will get my picks tonight and I will be back tomorrow morning for work as unlucky as ever . . . but I’m OK with that.
... *Jim Daniels*

Check-In

Discussion Questions:

Imagine that in tomorrow’s mail, you find you have won five, ten, fifty million dollars. Now take these moments of silence to empty the pockets in your mind and see what thoughts collect.

Take these questions in order:

1. Would you keep your job?
2. Would you continue to live where you are?
3. What would you buy?
4. What would you share with friends or relatives?
5. What causes would you support?
6. How could your newfound wealth enhance your spiritual life? How would you like to change your life?

Check-Out

Closing Words:

Will winning the lottery make you happy? Well that’s the million-dollar question. There are plenty of cautionary tales of rags to riches to tears. Basically if you were unhappy before you won, you’ll be unhappy after you win. A small win won’t change your life but will put a spring in your step. Experts calculate that the exact amount most likely to make you happy is \$1,869 win . . . so remind me, what the chances of that are. . .
. *Allison Daniels for CNN*

Extinguish Chalice

(Lesson 6 by Glenn Turner, First Unitarian Universalist Church, Auburn, ME)

Hope

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

Spirit of Life and Love,
We have gathered here in search of answers to hard questions.
We have come in search of understanding, in search of community.
We have come in search of hope and healing.

Let this be a place not only of searching, but of discovery.
Let this be a place not only of learning, but of wisdom.
Let this be a place not only of meeting, but of connection.
And let this be a place where healing fosters giving, and hope fosters service.

. . . Rev. Sue Ayer

Check-In

Discussion Questions:

1. What does hope mean to you?
2. When has your sense of hope been shaken? Describe what happened and how you responded.
3. From what do you draw hope in your personal life?

Check –Out

Closing Words:

Hope drifts up
Covering my soul
Such comfort.

. . . D. Schmid, The Mountain

Institute 2008

A fiery orange ball
The sun rises again today
My heart begins to warm

. . . C. Holt, The Mountain Institute

2008

My father-in-law spent 7 years in a Siberian prison camp after World War I. He told me that of all the words he knows, the most important was HOPE.

. . . D. Schmid, The Mountain

Institute 2008

Extinguish Chalice

Can You Come Out and Play?

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

We light this chalice to embrace the child in each of us. The child that knows how to play. The child that is fascinated by keys and dandelions, by clouds and balls that bounce. The child that dreams and imagines and creates wonders out of nothing. The child who is always in the moment yet touches and embraces where dragons fly and horses run free. The child that doesn't yet know the difference between the possible and impossible. . . .

Stephanie Certain Matz

Check-In

Reading:

One day a little boy was playing in front of his house, when it occurred to him that he had never seen an adult playing with a red wagon like his. And he burst into tears!

When his mother asked why he was crying, the boy said he was afraid that when he grew up he wouldn't be able to play with his red wagon anymore.

The mother assured the child that when he grew up he could play with his red wagon if he wanted to. That quieted him for a moment. Then he burst into even greater sobs!

The mother asked, "What's the matter now?" The boy replied, "I'm afraid that when I grow up, I won't want to play with my red wagon anymore."

. . . *Anthony Friess Perrino, The Numbering of Our Days (adapted)*

Discussion Questions:

1. Think of a time in your life when you were really having FUN. What were you doing? What were you feeling? Can you tell that story?
2. What were your favorite ways to play as a child? What made them interesting and exciting?
3. How do you "play" as an adult? Why do you value this kind of play?
4. Compare your childhood play to recreation you enjoy as an adult. Do the differences or similarities indicate anything meaningful about you and your life?
5. Do you ever feel like you just don't deserve, or can't afford to, have more fun? Why?
6. What would you do if you could spend an entire day just playing? What's stopping you from doing it?

Check-Out

Closing Reading:

May I remember to keep my face to the sun,

To play, laugh, and experience joy

Whenever possible,

To celebrate the world and my fellow

Human beings,

To say YES! To life each day.

Extinguish Chalice

(Lesson 8 from Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist, Palatine, IL)

Individuality and Community

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

As surely as we belong to the universe we belong together.

We join here to transcend the isolated self, to reconnect, to know ourselves to be at home, here on earth, under the stars, linked with each other. . . . *Rev. Margaret A. Keip*

Check-In

Readings:

We are all longing to go home to some place we have never been – a place half-remembered and half-envisioned we can only catch glimpses of from time to time. 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. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Somewhere where we can be free.

. . . *by Starhawk*

Through the lens of the spirit I can see, though imperfectly, that we are all one in creation. . . in the deepest sense, my individuality is an illusion. . . . *by Bruce Birchard*

If a man does not keep pace with his companion, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.

. . . *by Henry David Thoreau*

It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.

. . . *by Ralph Waldo Emerson*

The only journey is the journey within.

. . . *by Rainer Maria Rilke*

Discussion Questions:

1. What experiences are you currently having regarding the polarity between individuality (and the need for autonomy and solitude), and community (and the need for connection with others)?
2. How has your need for individuality and for community changed at different times in your life?
3. Talk about a time when being part of a community was helpful in discovering your individuality, and when it was limiting.
4. Where do you find the most fulfillment in experiencing your individuality, and where do you find the most fulfillment in your connection with others?
5. What do you find most challenging about your individuality, and about being in community?

Check-Out

Closing Words:

Our time in this place may have ended, but our connection to each other and this community remains. Together, may we walk the path of justice, speak words of love, live the selfless deed, trod gently upon the earth, and fill the world with compassion. . . . *by Kathy A. Huff*

Extinguish the Chalice

(Lesson 9 by UU Church in Eugene, OR, January 2010)

Humor

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

“Laughter is man’s most distinctive emotional expression. Man shares his capacity for love and hate, anger and fear, loyalty and brief with other living creatures. But humor – which has an intellectual as well as emotional element, belongs to man.” . . . by

Margaret Mead

Check-In

Readings:

Humor matters in our relationships. Humor matters in preventing the buildup of stress. Humor matters in our perspective of life and thrives between man’s aspirations and his limitations.

Frank Colby writes: “Men will confess to treason, arson, false teeth, or a wig. How many of them will own up to a lack of humor? Do you consider yourself as a person with a sense of humor? Do you think other people consider you as having a sense of humor? If you don’t think you have a sense of humor, how do you stop yourself from being humorous?”

Discussion Questions:

1. When do you consider humor to be a constructive and when destructive?
2. What is the role of humor in politics and in our cherished beliefs about what is right and wrong?
3. What part does humor play in religion and in your religious beliefs?
4. How do you respond to the following statements about religion and humor:
5. – Mark Twain: “The secret source of humor is not joy, but sorrow; there is no humor in heaven.”
- The Koran: He deserves Paradise who makes his companions laugh.”

Check-Out

Closing Words:

“Humor is an affirmation of dignity, a declaration of man’s superiority to all that befalls him.”
. . . by *Romain Gary*

Extinguish the Chalice

The Carpet Bag

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

The Chinese sage Lao Tzu once said, “He or she who knows that enough is enough will always have enough.” May we learn to be grateful for whatever we have so that it may be enough.

Check-In

Reading:

You know we do it every day. Every morning we go out blinking into the glare of our freedom, into the wilderness of work and the world, making maps as we go, looking for signs that we’re on the right path. And on some good days we walk right out of our oppressions, those things that press us down from the outside of (as often) from the inside; we shake off the shackles of fear, prejudice, timidity, closed-mindedness, selfishness, self-righteousness, and claim our freedom outright, terrifying as it is – our freedom to be human, and humane.

Every morning, every day, we leave our houses, not knowing if it will be for the last time, and we decide what we’ll take with us, what we’ll carry; how much integrity, how much truth-telling, how much compassion (in case somebody along the way may need some), how much arrogance, how much anger, how much humor, how much willingness to change and to be changed, to grow and to be grown. How much faith and hope, how much love and gratitude – you pack these with your lunch and your medications, your date book and your papers. Every day, we gather what we think we’ll need, pick up what we love and all that we so far believe, put on our history, shoulder our experience and memory, take inventory of our blessings, and we start walking toward morning.
. *By Rev. Victoria Stafford, “Walking Toward Morning”*

Discussion Questions: In the respectful process of deep sharing and deep listening, let’s talk about our own carpet bag, our own baggage. If space were limited – space for material, spiritual, or emotional things – what would be most important to take with us and why?

What other things struck you as important to carry with you?

What can we do to make sure we always pack lightly?

What would you leave behind?

Did anyone else’s chosen baggage attract you? Are you willing to swap something out to take that along?

Check-Out

Closing Words:

Do everything with a mind that lets go.

Do not expect any praise or reward.

If you let go a little, you will have a little peace.

If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of peace.

If you let go completely, you will know complete peace and freedom. Your struggles with the world will have come to an end.

So may we be.

. . . *By Thesavada Buddhist Monk from*

Achaan Chah

Extinguish the Chalice

The Bucket List

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

The more faithfully you listen to the voice within you, the better you will hear what is sounding outside. And only he who listens can speak. Is this the starting point of the road towards the union of your two dreams – to be allowed in clarity of mind to mirror life and in purity of heart to mold it?

. . . by *Dag Hammarskjold*

Check-In

Readings:

There are many views of what happens after we die. Despite any differences we have in what comes next, there is no question that we are faced with the same challenge – making the most of this lifetime.

Discussion Questions:

In this movie, the two main characters are in a unique situation – they know when they will die, more or less, and they have the means to live their final days as they wish. Most of us will not know when we're going to die, not to mention the billions to play with?

Imagine you're in the position of the character Carter Chambers from the movie *The Bucket List*. You have six months to a year to live and a new billionaire friend paying for whatever the two of you want to do. Make your version of a bucket list for this specific situation. Later on, if you want, you can make one for your real life situation. What have you always dreamed of doing that you would do if you found yourself in Carter's shoes?

1. During the movie, Carter quotes a study with 1000 participants that asked "If you could know the exact moment of your death, would you want to know?" If it was possible to find this information out, would you want to know?
2. Would knowing when you are going to die change how you live your life? If so, in what way?
3. Making a bucket list brings attention to our mortality. Some might say this is depressing. Others might say that being aware of how fleeting life is helps us make the most of it. Not knowing when you will die, if you were to make a bucket list for the remainder of your lifetime, what would some of the top items be?

Check-Out

Closing Words:

Change often brings new adventures, new opportunities.

Change also brings insecurity and anxiety.

Change disrupts familiar patterns and requires us to look at things differently.

Change is something gained, something lost; losing balance and regaining equilibrium

. . . until the next change.

Extinguish the Chalice

Faith

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

We have gathered here in search of answers to hard questions.

We have come in search of understanding, in search of community.

We have come in search of hope and healing.

Let this be a place not only of searching, but of discovery.

Let this be a place not only of learning, but of wisdom.

Let this be a place not only of meeting, but of connection.

And let this be a place where healing fosters giving, and hope fosters service.

. . . Adapted from Rev. Sue Ayer

Check-In

Readings:

Believe nothing just because a so-called wise person said it. Believe nothing just because a belief is generally held. Believe nothing just because it is said in ancient books. Believe nothing just because it is said to be of divine origin. Believe nothing just because someone else believes it. Believe only what you yourself test and judge to be true. *. . . paraphrased from the Buddha*

Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.

. . . By Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Cherish your doubt, for doubt is the servant of truth.

Question your convictions, for beliefs too tightly held strangle the mind and its natural wisdom.

Suspect all certitudes, for the world whirls on – nothing abides.

Yet in our inner rooms full of doubt, inquiry and suspicion, let a corner be reserved for trust.

For without trust there is no space for communities to gather or for friendships to be forged.

Indeed, this is the small corner where we connect – and reconnect – with each other.

. . . By Michael A. Schuler

Perhaps this tendency of humans to worship and believe was rooted in our physiology, written into our genes, and encoded in our very makeup . . . Perhaps instinctively; human beings had always known that worshipping a higher power was good for them! And indeed, if they were calling forth the relaxation response, medical science could prove it was good for them! I speculated that perhaps humans are in a profound physical way, “wired for God” . . . I am referring to all the deities of the Judeo-Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu traditions, to gods and goddesses, as well as to all the spirits worshipped and beloved by humans all over the world and throughout history. In my scientific observations, I have learned that no matter what name you give the Infinite Absolute you worship, no matter what theology you ascribe to, the results of believe in God are the same.

. . . By Herbert Benson, in “Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief”

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you have faith (trust, a sense of confidence, belief) in? How has this affected you? How has this changed over the years?
2. What do you have doubts about? How has that affected you? How has that changed over the years?

3. What experiences have you had in which both faith and doubt were present, and how did that impact you?

Check-Out

Closing Words:

Go your way, knowing not the answers to all things, yet seeking always the answer to one more thing than you know.

. . . By John W. Bringham

Extinguish the Chalice

(Lesson 13 by Unitarian Universalist Church in Eugene, OR, February 2010)

Leading and Following

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

To listen is to continually give up all expectation and to give our attention, completely and freshly, to what is before us, not really knowing what we will hear or what that will mean. In the practice of our days, to listen is to lean in, softly, with a willingness to be changed by what we hear.

. . . *By Mark Nepo*

Check In

Readings:

Great leaders rally people to a better future . . . (leaders are) restless for change, impatient for progress . . . (have) optimism . . . (believe they) are the one to make this future come true . . . curious and inquisitive . . . discover what is universal and capitalize on it . . . your ability to be clear and your followers' feelings of confidence are casually linked.

. . . *By Marcus Buckingham*

The challenge of leadership is to be strong, but not rude; be kind, but not weak; be bold, but not bully; be thoughtful, but not lazy; be humble, but not timid; be proud, but not arrogant; have humor, but without folly.

. . . *By Jim Rohn*

A leader's role is to raise people's aspirations for what they can become and to release their energies so they will try to get there.

. . . *By David R. Gergen*

You cannot be a leader, and ask other people to follow you, unless you know how to follow, too.

. . . *By Sam Rayburn*

What makes a good follower? The single most important characteristic may well be a willingness to tell the truth. In a world of growing complexity leaders are increasingly dependent on their subordinates for good information, whether the leaders want to hear it or not. Followers who tell the truth and leaders who listen to it are an unbeatable combination.

. . . *By Warren G. Bennis*

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.

. . . *By Marge Piercy*

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe a time when you had a leadership role and found the experience rewarding and satisfying and/or frustrating and unsatisfying. What did you learn from these experiences?
2. Share about a situation where you experience a shift back and forth between leading and following, and what works well, or not, in changing the roles.
3. How do you decide whether to take a leading role or a following/supporting role in a church or other organization or group? Share some examples.

Check-Out

Closing Words:

What is precious is you in others, others in you. We enter into the being and lives of others, as they do into ours. Sometimes momentarily. Sometimes enduringly. This is what love essentially is, to be part of one another. In simple sympathy, in close friendship, in shared stories, in sorrow and in joy.”

Extinguish the Chalice

(Lesson 14 by Unitarian Universalist Church in Eugene, OR, April 2010)

Pray, Meditate, Contemplate

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

Hear me, four quarters of the world.
A relative I am!
Give me the strength to walk the soft earth.
Give me the eyes to see and the strength to understand.
Look upon these faces of children without numbers.
That they may face the winds and walk the good road to the day of quiet.
This is my prayer; hear me.

. . . *By Black Elk*

Check-In

Readings:

Pray as you can, not as you can't.

. . . *By John Chapman*

But genuine prayer is based on recognizing the Origin of all that exists, and opening ourselves to it . . .

One can then communicate with this Source, worship it, and ultimately place one's very center in it.

. . . *By Pierre Ferrucci*

But when we have been in touch with the ultimate dimension, then whether our temple or our practice center burns down, whether people smear our reputation, are jealous of us, or accuse us unjustly, we can still smile and be peaceful and joyful as usual. What we thought to be success, what we thought to be the basis of our happy life, we do not need anymore. Because our happiness is already there in the ultimate dimension, it goes beyond all ideas of success and failure.

. . . *Thich Nhat Hanh*

Meditation is our support for learning to open to our discomfort. It gives us a way to move closer to our thoughts and emotions, a way to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion – the qualities of *bodhicitta*, the fully awakened heart and mind.

. . . *James Shaheen*

The mysteries of faith are degraded if they are made into an object of affirmation and negation, when in reality they should be an object of contemplation.

. . . *Simone Weil*

The ultimate value of life depends upon awareness and the power of contemplation rather than upon mere survival.

. . . *Aristotle*

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you have a practice of prayer, meditation, or contemplation? What is it like? What is your experience with it?

2. What do you see as the purposes and benefits of prayer, meditation, or contemplation? Are there any rules?
3. If you pray, who, if anything, are you praying to? Is prayer possible if you don't believe in God?
4. What room, if any, do you see for prayer, meditation or contemplation in your UU faith?

Check-Out

Closing Words:

I thank You God for most this amazing
Day; for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
And a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
Which is natural which is infinite which is yes.

(I who have died am alive again today,
And this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
Day of life and love and wings; and of the gay
Great happening illimitably earth)

How should tasting touching hearing seeing
Breathing any – lifted from the no
Of all nothing – human merely being
Doubt unimaginably You?

(now the ears of my ear awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened).

. . . e.e.cummings

Extinguish the Chalice

(Lesson 15 from First Parish in Cambridge, Unitarian Universalist. Written by Tracy Blanchard)

Creating Paradise

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

We are all wanderers, passing through,
Guests of the universe,
And our job as a religious clan is to share earth's bounty
And to set a warm, inviting place for one another.

... *Carolyn and Tom Owen-Towle*

Check-In

Reading:

In 1843, our Unitarian ancestor, A. Bronson Alcott moved his family from Boston to Harvard, MA to create a New Eden. "Fruitlands" was an attempt to strengthen their spirituality through self-reliant simple living.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do we create paradise?
2. What principles and practices would be important for you if you began a utopian community?
3. When have you glimpsed paradise on earth? Share a personal experience.

Check-Out

Closing Words:

Wherever you are is home
And the earth is paradise
Wherever you set your feet down is holy land
You don't live off it like a parasite.
You live in it, and it in you.
Or you don't survive.
And that is the only worship of God there is.

... *Wilfred Pelletier and Ted Poole*

Extinguish the Chalice

(Lesson 16 from Rev. Amy Bowden Freedman)

Creating and Destroying

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

We arrive together here - travelers on life's journey – seekers of meaning, of love, of healing, of justice, of truth – The journey is long, and joy and woe accompany us at every step. – None is born that does not die. - None feels pleasure that does not also feel pain – The tear has not yet dried on the cheek but the lips curve sweetly in a smile.

Numerous are our origins, our paths, and our destinations. – And yet, happily, our ways have joined together here today. May our joining be a blessing. – May it bring comfort to those who are in pain. May it bring hope to those who despair. – May it bring peace to those who tremble in fear. – May it bring wisdom and guidance for our journeys. And though this joining may be for just a moment in time – the moment is all we can ever be certain of. May we embrace this, and every instant of our lives.

. . . Adapted from Andrew

Pakula

Check-In

Readings:

Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.

. . . George Bernard

Shaw

Our way out involves both resistance and renewal: saying no to what is, so that we can reshape and recreate the world. Our challenge is communal, but to face it we must be empowered as individuals and create structures of support and celebration that can teach us freedom. Creation is the ultimate resistance, the ultimate refusal to accept things as they are. For it is in creation that we encounter Mystery . . .

. . . By Starhawk

Without this playing with fantasy no creative work has ever yet come to birth. The debt we owe to the play of imagination is incalculable.

. . . By Carl

Jung

The spirit of the universe is at once creative and destructive . . . it creates while it destroys and destroys while it creates, and therefore it remains to us a riddle. And we must inevitably resign ourselves to this.

. . . Albert

Schweitzer

Destroying is a necessary function in life. Everything has its season, and all things eventually lose their effectiveness and die. . . .

By Margaret J. Wheatley

I have seen the science I worshipped, and the aircraft I loved, destroying the civilization I expected them to serve. . . .

By Charles Lindberg

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe a time when you created something, and how you feel about that experience.

2. Describe a time when you destroyed something, and how did you feel about that experience.
3. Tell about a time of personal or social transformation that was significant for you. .

Check-Out

Closing Words:

May you know fully and deeply the blessings of each of your heart's seasons.

The inward turning of Winter,

Springtime's lush renewal

The effortless, steady growth of summer,

And autumn's rich harvest.

May your passage from season to season be blessed –

Eased by hands to hold, and by the light of love to guide you on.

. . . *By Andrew*

Pakula

Extinguish the Chalice

(Lesson 17 by the Unitarian Universalist Church in Eugene, OR, May 2010)

Tradition and Innovation

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

We seek to be a compassionate community that is present and listens with care to our sharing of memories, concerns, dreams, and hopes. May we find ways for our stories to deepen our connection and enhance our understanding.

Check-In

Readings:

Family Traditions counter alienation and confusion. They help us define who we are; they provide something steady, reliable and safe in a confusing world.

. . . *By Susan Lieberman*

Many of the people who attend religious services in our society are not interested in theology, want nothing too exotic and dislike the idea of change. They find the established rituals provide them with a link with tradition and give them a sense of security.

. . . *By Karen Armstrong, "A History of God"*

We do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.

. . . *By Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Spirit of Life, come unto me
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;
Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.
Roots hold me close; wings set me free;
Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.

. . . *By Carolyn McDade*

Discussion Questions:

1. What traditions from your past (family, cultural, religious) are still important to you and provide meaning and stability in your life?
2. Talk about some innovations that have been important to you, and what has it been like to let go of prior traditions?
3. What are some current areas of polarity between tradition and innovation that are challenging for you?

Check-Out

Closing Words:

May we offer to one another, and to ourselves, the fruits of our lives, that others, in return, may be a source of inspiration to those whose lives they touch.

. . . *Adapted from Howard Thurman*

Extinguish the Chalice

Holding On and Letting Go

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

We come together in an attitude of openness – not knowing quite what will happen, yet daring to receive a new idea, a new experience, substance for our minds and our hearts. We come with an attitude of praise, expressing our thankfulness for the good that has come into our lives. We come with an attitude of humility, knowing how much we need one another, how alone we can be in the world, how vulnerable if we face life solely by ourselves. We come in the spirit of love, seeking human warmth and fellowship in the hands and faces of those around us. We come in the spirit of joy, seeking reconfirmation and renewal of life, of love, and of hope.

. . . *Adapted from Peter Lee Scott*

Check-In

Readings:

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.

. . . *Adapted from T. Mickelson & Rev. Jory*

Agate

And then the day came when the risk to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

. . . *By Anais Nin*

It's not so much that we're afraid of change or so in love with the old ways, but it's that place in between that we fear . . . It's like being between trapezes. It's Linus when his blanket is in the dryer. There is nothing to hold on to.

. . . *By Marilyn Ferguson*

If you don't get what you want you suffer; if you get what you don't want, you suffer; even when you get exactly what you want, you suffer because you can't hold onto it forever. Your mind is your predicament. It wants to be free of change. Free of pain, free of the obligations of life and death. But change is a law, and no amount of pretending will alter that reality. . . . *By Dan Millman*

Hold on to what is good even if it is a handful of earth. Hold on to what you believe even if it is a tree which stands by itself. Hold on to what you must do even if it is a long way from here. Hold on to my hand even when I have gone away from you. . . . *By Nancy Wood*

Discussion Questions:

1. Tell about a time of holding on to and letting go of things, and how you decided what to keep and what to discard or give away or sell. What or who was helpful in making those choices? How might you make the same or different choices now?
2. Share about an experience of holding on to or letting go of relationships, and how you feel now about those choices.

3. Talk about holding on to or letting go of dreams, goals, or commitments, and how that has impacted you.
4. Talk about your experience of being in “that place in between” neither in the familiar old situation, not yet fully in the new.
5. How does holding on and letting go apply to our church transitions? What are your feelings in these transitions?

Check-Out

Closing Words:

To live in this world you must be able to do three things: to love what is mortal; to hold it against your bones, knowing your own life depends on it; and, when the time comes to let it go, to let it go.

. . . *By Mary Oliver*

Extinguish the Chalice

(Lesson 19 from the Unitarian Universalist Church in Eugene, OR, April 2010)

Belonging

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words:

I will sing a new song. As difficult as it is, I must learn the new song . . . capable of meeting the new need. I must fashion new words born of all the new growth of my life, my mind and my spirit. I must prepare for new melodies that have never been mine before . . . How I love the old familiarity of the wearied melody – how I shrink from the harsh discords of the new untried harmonies. (May I) rejoice with each new day and delight my spirit in each fresh unfolding. I will sing, this day, a new song. . .

. . . *Howard Thurman, theologian and*

activist

Check-In

Reading: Litany of Diversity (In memory of the Rev. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley)

If the colors of our skin or the lands of our ancestors are different,

It need not divide us

If the genders we claim are different,

It need not divide us

If the stages in our lives are different,

It need not divide us

If our means of achieving the common good are different,

It need not divide us

If who we love and how we love are different,

It need not divide us

If the spiritual paths we follow are different,

It need not divide us

If our abilities to think and do are different,

It need not divide us

If we join spirits and hearts,

Our differences will not divide us, but deeply bind us together.

. . . *By Michael Sallwasser*

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe a situation or experience when you felt that you didn't belong, or were excluded. How did it feel?
2. Describe a situation or experience when you felt that you truly belonged. How did it feel?

Check-Out

Closing Words:

We have a lot more humanity to learn about; a lot more practicing to do, with a lot more people than we are used to . . . We will have to learn to love each other more, and in better ways than we do right now. We will have to learn to forgive each other more and in better ways, than we are used to doing. We . . . want our churches . . . to be safe. But safety is a relative term, when it comes to religious community. For if we are really practicing what it means to be human, in an ever widening circle of humanity, our congregations may become some of the most dangerous places we know, because they will be come faithful communities of change . . .

. . . *By Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt*

Extinguish the Chalice

(Lesson 20 from First Parish in Cambridge, Unitarian Universalist)