

"Thank You for Your Loving Hands"

Thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart, your loving ways—
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.
And if you ever doubt yourself, remember us, who love you well—
We know all the gifts you bring into the world each day.
So thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart, your loving ways,
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.
—by Judy Fjell and Lisa Bregger

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent, and to come to the group one last time and say good-bye if I need to quit
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people's stories
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn

Covenant Groups

Ministry: What We Do Together



Ministry: What We Do Together

Chalice Lighting

We are here to follow the promptings of our deepest heart. We are here with expectations, alive, spoken and unspoken. We are here because we are human. Creatures of solitude and communion. Wanting wholeness, knowing brokenness. We meet here once again to remind ourselves of what we already know. We open ourselves to word, story, song. To whatever breaks in upon us or summons us to speak or act. Our time together affects our time apart. We want to participate, to be known, to be loved. We know limits, yet so much is possible.

—Mark Belletini

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings

We . . . must learn to see ourselves as a community, a people—and not simply as individuals who happen to gather on Sunday.

—John Morgan

One of the enduring legacies of the Protestant Reformation is the idea of the whole church as ministers—the priesthood of all believers. . . . This simple structure allows each . . . to have a place in the church where they are known well and deeply. . . . But the real magic of the small group ministry concept is not just that it allows each of us to get our needs met, though it does that. The magic is that at the very same time that we are getting our needs met—being ministered unto—we become ministers.

—Roberta Finkelstein

Ministry can be like riding in a cattle car in the dead of winter—you appreciate the warmth of those around you; but you never know when you'll be stepped on, or worse.

—Anne Odin Heller

What exactly makes this [small group] a ministry? Covenant groups exist to enable us to help one another, especially through hard times, to help us examine issues of ultimate concern, like where we came from, and why we're here, and where we're bound; and to help us connect to something larger than ourselves. That is the size and shape of ministry.

—from UUC Seattle brochure

A Buddhist story tells us that there was once a poor man, beaten down by life, empty of hope and ambition, lying in a foul gutter, and . . . there was a *sangha*, a religious community, a teaching community, with great heart and an open spirit, and . . . the community lifted up the poor man, and embraced him as one of their own, and . . . the community patiently loved and patiently taught him until he became whole. This man joined the community in love and eventually became the finest teacher-priest, the finest roshi that the community had ever known. Each word and deed of this story is within the talents and capacities of any religious community that is willing to love intentionally with an open heart and to teach with respect and compassion. Such a community . . . lifts everyone involved to a nobler nature.

—Anne Odin Heller

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening

Round 1: Briefly share your understanding of ministry.

Round 2: How has small group ministry been important to your life journey? In what ways have you experienced “a sense of roots, place, belonging, sharing, and caring?”

Round 3: Share any insights you have had from the sharing of other members of the group, or anything else you would like to share about the topic.

Closing Words (responsive reading is optional)

We clasp the hands of those who go before us,
And the hands of those who come after us.

We enter the little circle of each other's arms
And the larger circle of lovers whose hands are joined in a dance.

And the larger circle of all creatures,
Passing in and out of life, who move also in a dance.

To a music so subtle and vast that no ears hear it.

. . . except in fragments.

—Wendell Berry

Closing Song

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business

Homework for the next meeting.

Homework: Ministry—What We Do Together

This session focuses on the “ministry” aspect of small group ministry, which began in our UU community around 1998. Our covenant groups follow the pattern of small group ministry, developed for Unitarian Universalists by the reverends Glenn Turner, Calvin Dame, and Thandeka, to name a few.

Ministry is what we all do—together. Ministry is that quality of being in community that affirms human dignity—beckons forth hidden possibilities, invites us into deeper, more constant, reverent relationships and carries forward our heritage of hope and liberation.

—*The Rev. Gordon McKeeman*

Glenn Turner reminds us of the words of the apostle Paul, “Though our outward humanity is in decay, yet day by day we are inwardly renewed.” We ask how and what is it that leads to this possible transformation. Thandeka suggests that small group ministries transform Unitarian Universalists: “They regenerate the power of our bodies to feel the presence of others as the natal hour of everything living in religion. The source of this regenerating power is life itself, ever new.” Small group ministry offers us an open-ended quest, inviting us to depth.

Our ministry with each other includes “acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth.” Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? This is the third principle of Unitarian Universalism. Often our covenant groups offer opportunities for acceptance and growth that may not occur in other venues.

What we’ve learned is that small group ministry is the single most effective way to provide people with a sense of roots, place, belonging, sharing, and caring.

—*Glenn Turner*

Questions to Ponder

- What does ministry mean to you? Have you been aware of times in your life when people or groups have ministered to you? Have you ministered to others? In what ways?
- What does transformation mean to you? Can you imagine transformation taking place in your small group ministry experience? If so, how has your participation in a covenant group changed your life?
- Looking at your current place in your life journey, what has been lost that you might reclaim? What would you like to relearn about yourself?
- What small things (or big things) did you do (or not do) that may have touched another’s life? What affect did you see? Perhaps there were affects that you did not see. What might they be?
- Select a person whom you trust and who you think may have gained some benefit from you. Ask them to tell you what affect you have on their lives. (Or if this is too direct a question, imagine that you have asked them.)

Leader's Guide: Ministry—What We Do Together

This session focuses on the ministry aspect of small group ministry.

Chalice Lighting (2 min)

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin.

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—Mark Belletini

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows (10 min)

Ask group members to tell in one or two sentences: “How you are today?” Share information about absent members.

Silence (3 min)

Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence. Time it!

Shared Readings (5 min)

Go around your group, letting each person in turn read from the shared readings found in the bulletin until all the readings are finished.

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (65 min)

Do your rounds of deep sharing and deep listening. Pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure that all get to share at least once.

Round 1 (10 min): Share briefly your understanding of ministry.

Round 2 (40 min): How has small group ministry been important to your life journey? In what ways have you experienced “a sense of roots, place, belonging, sharing, and caring?”

Round 3 (15 min): Share any insights you have had from the sharing of other members of the group, or anything else you would like to share about the topic.

Closing Words (1 min)

Closing words may be read as responsive reading, or all together.

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And the larger circle of lovers whose hands are joined in a dance.
And the larger circle of all creatures,
Passing in and out of life, who move also in a dance.
To a music so subtle and vast that no ears hear it.
... except in fragments.

—Wendell Berry

Closing Song (1 min)

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business (5 min)

Pass out the homework for next time.