

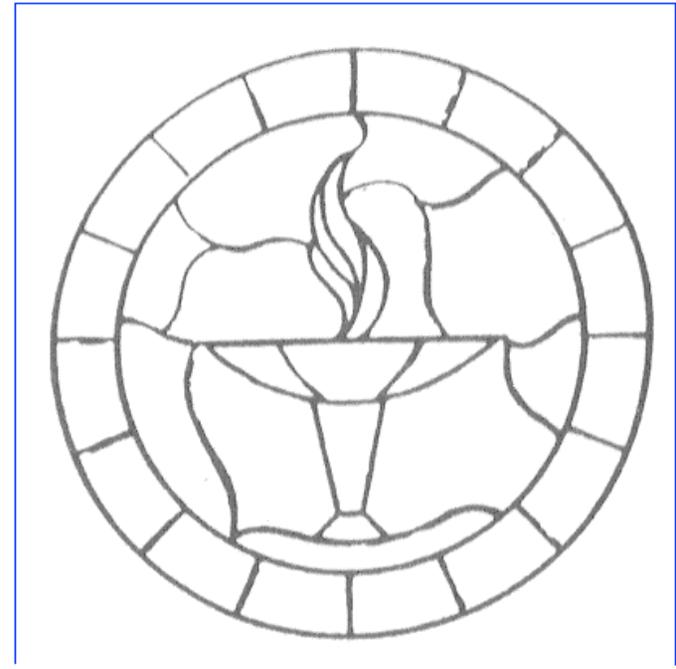
Covenant Group

Sharing Our Histories

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 goodbye if I need to quit.
- 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.



Sharing Our Histories

Chalice Lighting

Brief Introductions

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support

Business

Shared Readings

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool

To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.

To reach out for another is to risk exposing our true self.

To place our ideas before the crowd is to risk certainty.

To dream aloud is to risk accountability.

To love is to risk not being loved in return.

To hope is to risk despair.

To try is to risk failure.

To reach out is to risk rejection.

To live is to risk dying.

To fear risk is to never live.

When I see you with worry on your brow and shadows in your eyes, and I say to you, "What's up?" remind me gently that I was not there when you made that journey to the center of your soul. Tell me as kindly as you can that I am sleeping when night clutches at you and you are driven to a place in your heart which is ever night. Do not let me say, "Don't worry," when worry is all you know and it feels as if worry is all you'll ever know.

For none of us ever really walks in another's shoes or knows the innermost rooms of a person's heart. None of us truly knows the lonely places of another's journey or the causes of the lines around another's eyes. Therefore, let us be gentle with one another. Let us listen more than we speak and accept more than we judge. Let our open, outstretched hands reach and touch that we may walk along together for a little while in friendship and in trust.

Elizabeth Tarbox, Life Tides

Introduce Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

During this time, one person speaks at a time, into an appreciative silence. The only response to the speaker is non-verbal, although the leader may express thanks if that seems comfortable. There is a brief moment of silence between speakers so that we can let the sharing "sink in." Then the next person will share. This may seem awkward or unsupportive at first, but most groups find it very satisfying once they get used to it.

The one who is sharing has the job of speaking deeply from their heart about the topic at hand. Listeners have the task of keeping an open heart to what is shared.

The next speaker has the task of leaving some space before they speak. The leader is responsible for helping speakers remember the time frame they have to speak in. The speaking may go in any order. It is assumed that everyone in the group will speak, but if someone does not want to speak, they may pass.

In a second "round" everyone who wishes to add second thoughts or thoughts sparked by what was shared may do so. It is not appropriate to ask questions about what someone else shared, only to reflect on what the sharing sparked in oneself. Once again, there should be a bit of silence between speakers.

If everyone has had a chance to speak a second time and there is time remaining, there may be a more conversational time. Those who are speaking should be aware of whether others wish to speak. Once again, the focus should be on what you are thinking and feeling, rather than probing others or attempting to solve problems for them.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Homework for next time

Closing Words and song "Go Now in Peace"

Leader Guide for Sharing Our Histories

- Put out name tags.
- Put out list of members, phone and e-mail
- As people arrive as two people to volunteer to read the Elizabeth Tarbox reading (one paragraph each)
- As people arrive ask them to check that phone numbers and e-mail are correct

Chalice Lighting:

We come together in an attitude of openness - not knowing quite what will happen, yet daring to receive a new idea, a new experience, sustenance 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

Brief Introductions: Go around circle with each person telling one thing that drew them to First UU Church and one thing that brings them joy these days.

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

Group Business: Tell them how glad you are they are in the group and how much you're looking forward to getting to know them.

- Each meeting will last an hour and a half to two hours and will be centered around a certain topic. The topic for the next meeting will be given out at the end of the meeting.
- We will meet from October through March.
- Tell them where the bathroom is.

- Usually any business is handled at the end of the meeting – and is quite brief. Today it is early in the meeting and will be longer since we're just beginning.
- Look at covenant on back of bulletin. Let's read them. Ask one person to read the first. Any comments or problems. Can we all agree to this? Continue through all covenants.

Shared Readings: Go around your group, letting each person in turn read a sentence of the first reading. Give some space, then ask the two readers to read the Tarbox reading.

Introduce Deep Sharing/Deep Listening: Tell them the deep sharing/deep listening is the core of the covenant group. It is a unique way of sharing and listening, so we'll spend a few minutes getting acquainted with this process. With each person reading one paragraph at a time, go around the circle. Ask for questions.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening: Do your rounds of deep sharing/deep listening. Ask for second thoughts as time allows, and finally a more conversational time. Since there are lots of extras, there may not be time for anything other than the initial sharing this time. Pay attention to the time allotted each person (about five minutes) to ensure all get to share at least once.

Group Business: Pass out homework for next time. Speak about the sources. Several of our themes speak about these sources. Give out card with the sources. The living tradition we share draws from many sources:

* Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;

* Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love;

* Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;

* Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;

* Humanist teaching which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.

* Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature

Closing words: Invite people to hold hands around the chalice and say in a word or short phrase what you will take away with you from today's session.

Sing: Go Now in Peace

Dear Covenant group member,

I am so happy you have agreed to be in this covenant circle. Over 70 members of the church are involved in covenant circles and find them to be a deepening, bonding, nurturing experience.

The purpose of this letter is two-fold. I want to give you information about our first meeting and I also want to know that you have received this information. I ask you to respond to this e-mail/letter, which will assure me that I got your e-mail/address right and that you have the information for the first meeting. Just reply and let me know you got the info. Thanks.

Our circle will begin date at time at location . The meetings usually last for about an hour and a half. We will be meeting once or twice a month for the next 5-6 months. Please bring \$5.00 for the materials fee if you did not pay at the sign-up.

There is a waiting list for covenant groups, so please let me know if you are unable to be in this group. I understand that schedules and circumstances change. Just let me know so that your spot can be given to another person. Thank you.

Facilitators for the circle: Your name, telephone # and e-mail

Preparation for the first session

To help people to get to know each other, I ask you to prepare some sort of pictorial representation of your life up until now: a collage, a time line, a map, or whatever else appeals to you. Focus especially upon your religious background, any additional factors that influenced your approach to religion, and major life transitions or crises. We will be using this pictorial representation as a way of introducing ourselves and getting to know each other.

The following quotes may help you as you think about your life and create your collage, time line, or map of your life.

- At several points in our life we will have to relinquish a former self-image and move on. Judith Viorst
- The child and the joker are necessary, humiliating, and deflating companions. Humor punctures our pretensions. Romantic voyagers tend to take themselves too seriously., Alan Jones
- Our experience is composed rather of illusions lost than of wisdom acquired. Joseph Roux
- Wounds are the way we enter into another's life, and it shows they are real. Wounds are the way others can enter into our life, It shows we are real. Anon

- A young woman once said to an old woman, What is life's heaviest burden?
And the old woman said, To have nothing to carry. Jewish Tale

I look forward to our meeting on date ! Call me with any questions tel #.
 Your name/names