

## 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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.