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# Smart Church

**Chalice Circle Handbook** - Connie Goodbread

Small Group Ministry for Unitarian Universalist Congregations

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**Unitarian Universalism  
Ten Sessions**

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## Introduction

Unitarian Universalism is a covenantal not a creedal faith. Therefore, how we do what we do, the way we treat each other and behave, and the processes we use to help discern the path we will take, make all the difference in the world.

This Smart Church - Chalice Circle Handbook is designed to help your Chalice Circle Facilitators lead deep discussions. We begin every session with covenant.

Unitarian Universalism is a living tradition. Therefore, we must always be aware of the fact that the covenants we write, serve for as long as they hold meaning for the people. Some stand the test of time:

*“Love is the doctrine of this church.  
And service is its prayer.  
To dwell together in peace  
To seek knowledge in freedom  
To serve humankind in fellowship  
Thus do we covenant.”*

These are often more poetic - as Michael Dowd would say, *they are written in night language, the language of poetry and holy books*. They are love poems that we say to one another about our faith. They sing to us across time and hold deep meaning.

Others are more behavioral and straightforward. As Connie Barlow would say, *they are written in day language - the language of science and facts*.

*We covenant to:  
Live up to our commitments  
Treat one another with respect  
Be prepared  
Serve our mission  
Stay in relationship*

These covenants are written so that we can begin to build healthy norms into our congregational culture thus helping to create a safe environment so that we can align our efforts and trust one another as we work to build the just and loving world. The life time of this type of covenant may be shorter.

But whether we are writing a poetic covenant or a behavioral covenant we should come back to them often and ask ourselves if these are the promises we still wish to make to one another and if we are upholding them.

The work that your Chalice Circles will do on it's covenant is so that everyone will know how they can expect to be treated and how they are expected to treat others.

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**Remember** - that covenant begins with one's self and lives inside one's heart. When covenant is broken we begin the healing with ourselves. We ask; *How am I abiding by the covenant? What is my role? How could I behave differently in order to be in deeper relationship? What am I feeling? What do I need to own? Who do I need to get right with? Do I need to apologize? Can I ask to be forgiven? Can I forgive?*

### **Purpose of the Smart Church Chalice Circles**

Participants in Small Group Ministry (SGM) that I refer to as Chalice Circles should understand that this is a way for us to go deep. It is a way for us to get to know one another. Chalice Circles are not merely social groups nor are they affinity groups. These particular sessions are not meant to stay as a group for more than the allotted time of 10 sessions. Often people complain that - now we know each other and feel safe together so we just want to stay in this circle. You see that defeats the purpose. This handbook is written as a maturational growth tool. It is meant to help members of your congregation go deeper into Unitarian Universalism. It is meant to help members of your congregation get to know one another better. Not just one group of 6 - 10 but rather several groups of 6 - 10 people. If your Chalice Circle becomes friends - go be friends and then join another Chalice Circle. I bet you make friends there too.

**Suggested - Join the Small Group Ministry Network - <http://www.smallgroupministry.net>**

**Facilitators (some of this was adapted from the Small Group Ministry Facilitator Training Manual Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane)**

**Downloadable PDF**

**[http://www.uuspokane.org/images/SGM\\_Facilitator\\_Training\\_Manual.pdf](http://www.uuspokane.org/images/SGM_Facilitator_Training_Manual.pdf)**

Only trained facilitators should lead Smart Church Chalice Circles. They should be trained by the Minister (If your congregation has more than one Minister - good for you - the Senior Minister decides who trains and leads the Chalice Circle facilitator group.) This is a shared ministry experience. Your congregation may also develop a Small Group Ministry Steering Committee that would help to organize all of your congregation's Small Group Ministry. This could include Smart Church Chalice Circles as well as your Affinity Groups (the Men's Group, The Past Presidents Covenant Group, Humanist Forum, The Unitarian Universalist Parenting Group, The Campfire Crowd, The Book Club - etc), and other Small Group Ministry that you may also have in place.

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## Criteria for Choosing Chalice Circle Facilitators:

With input and insight from the Minister and other leaders such as the Small Group Ministry Steering Committee (two congregational leaders who help the Minister co-ordinate the program) we select leaders who:

- Are trusted members of the congregation - elders who hold in their hearts the deepest meaning of the faith
- Are clear about their role as partners in the shared ministry of the congregation
- Agree to participate in facilitator meetings and trainings
- Understand the difference between confidentiality and secrets
- Understand the difference between a class and a covenanted group
- Will follow the simple structure of Chalice Circles
- Are aware of the difference between leading a meeting and facilitating a meeting. Facilitators expect to listen a lot and talk only a little!

## Facilitator Fundamental Roles and Responsibilities

The role of the facilitator is to oversee the structure of their Small Group Ministry:

- Set the meeting time date and place
- Keep the discussion on track
- Ask deep questions
- Model deep listening skills
- Make sure to include everyone in discussion
- Focus on process rather than outcome
- Identify and handle awkward situations
- Help the group maintain covenant

Each facilitator is appointed and trained by the Minister and the Small Group Ministry Steering Committee and each is expected to:

- Participate in the training
- Attend the Chalice Circle Facilitator Group
- Follow the Chalice Circle format
- Commit to facilitate their group for 10 sessions.

## Group Members Roles and Responsibilities

The role of group members is to care for the well being of the group by attending to its primary purposes: the building of community, deepening spiritual understanding of Unitarian Universalism, and service.

Group members' responsibilities include:

- Attending all meetings unless illness, family, or other situation prevents

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- If absence or lateness is unavoidable, letting facilitator know in advance
  - Offering support to group members if welcomed and appropriate
  - Keeping covenant

### Host Roles and Responsibilities

The role of the host(s)

- Provide a place for the group's meeting
- Provide clear and concise directions to the meeting place
- Provide chairs or other appropriate seating for members
- Provide water, but not food

The host for a Chalice Circle may vary from month-to-month or remain the same. If the Chalice Circle is meeting at the church, the host should arrive early and set up the space.

### **Minister & SGM Steering Committee Roles and Responsibilities**

The Minister with help from the Small Group Ministry Steering Committee will choose and train the facilitators.

The Small Group Ministry Steering Committee is appointed by the congregational Board of Trustees with input from the Minister. The Minister and the Committee must work very closely together in shared ministry team work. Therefore, the Small Group Ministry Steering Committee should be made up of 2-3 trusted congregational elders who will be able to work well with their Minister. This is not a place for faction representation.

The Steering Committee will meet regularly to support the program and help with the planning of the Facilitator training and Facilitator Chalice Circle meetings. The Steering Committee will act as mentors for the facilitators as needed. The topics are in this handbook.

The Steering Committee will:

- Meet each fall to organize all the congregation's SGM
- Solicit Smart Church Chalice Circle and other SGM group members (not steering committee members)
- Sort these members based on their time and place preferences and needs
- Organize participant information for the Facilitators. This will include each person's contact information (name, phone numbers, e-mail, street address) and special needs
- Indicate who has agreed to act as Chalice Circle hosts
- Help the Minister select and train the Facilitators (in small congregations without a Minister, the Steering Committee would select and train the Facilitators)
- Be available when Facilitators have questions
- Track the progress of the groups and topics of SMG outside of the Smart Church Chalice Circles

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- Ensure that data is available on the congregation's calendar
  - Assist in the choosing of Service Projects when help is needed
  - Compile a list of Service Projects for others to utilize - remember that service projects can be either inside the congregation or outside in the larger parish. This is more easily accomplished if the congregation has a demographics study of the parish.
  - Survey all SGM and Chalice Circle facilitators and members annually to tweak the program to fit the congregation (if you are doing other SGM programs as well as these Smart Church Chalice Circles)

### **A Checklist for the Facilitator**

Your group information will include each person's contact information (name, phone numbers, e-mail, street address) and special needs. It will indicate who has offered to be a host (Facilitators should not act as hosts) and may suggest a good home to line up first. A group may have several offers of meeting places, but usually it works best to have a primary place and a second as back up. Another option for meeting location is to meet in a room at church if needed for accessibility or other reasons.

Please let the Steering Committee Chair know if there is anyone on your list that you would be uncomfortable working with. No need to explain. Just don't call that person. Call or e-mail the Steering Committee Chair and they will attempt to find another group for the person. Some folks may have changed schedules.

Decide on your first meeting date. You'll need to look ahead at your calendar and aim for a schedule that works best for you. Set the meeting dates for your group through all of the monthly sessions. Of course there will be sessions that people will occasionally miss. The group does have the option to reschedule a meeting date if agreed to by the group members.

Find your first host. Be sure that s/he has enough chairs or appropriate seating for the number of people in the group. Assure the host that s/he does not need to prepare refreshments. Get really clear directions to his/her home so you can tell the others as you call them. Ask the host if you can give his/her phone number and e-mail address to other group members in case they need more directions. You may want to line up a back up host, but it will probably work best if the groups meet at the same place each time.

Make arrangements for food if food will be served. (This is highly dependent on the time of day that your group will be meeting.)

Call each member of the group. Introduce yourself, and warmly invite him/her to the first gathering of the Smart Church Chalice Circle. Encourage people to come to the first meeting and let them know that the group plans to begin on time. Get confirmation that each does



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indeed want to be in the group. Discourage changes since it may be difficult to reassign people.

If someone withdraws from your group please let the SGM Steering Committee chair know. It opens up a space for others.

Briefly clarify the expectation that the group will begin and end on time. Give them your phone number/e-mail address in case they have questions, and let them know it is very helpful for them to contact you if they're unavailable to make a meeting, so that you and the group won't worry about them.

Determine if each person prefers e-mail or telephone contact from you. Reminder emails or calls are usually appreciated.

### Meeting Format Summary

- Light the Chalice / Ring Chimes
- Read the covenant (If the congregation does not have a covenant that they have written choose one from the gray Hymnal. If the congregation does have a covenant make sure that all the participants have a copy of it for the first meeting. You may give it out before or during the meeting.)
- Check-in
- Food (optional)
- Opening
- Meeting Topic - hand out the Smart Church Chalice Circle article for this session
- Ask the questions provided in this handbook
- Check-out
- Closing
- Extinguish the Chalice / Ring Chimes
- Group Business

### Meeting Format Detailed

- Chalice lighting, sound a chime and a moment of silence (1-3 minutes) This will help center your group
- Opening Words - read the covenant (if the congregation does not have a covenant that they have written choose one from our gray Hymnal) At the first meeting the group will write its own covenant or talk deeply about the congregational covenant. (See the first session)
- Check-in. Participants share brief news of what has been happening in their lives. Each group develops its own customs as to the length of sharing. This portion of the meeting may expand from time to time if circumstances call for it. Helpful lead-ins are:

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“What is most on your mind today?” “What do you need to share to be fully present to the group?” “Share something that has happened to you since we last met that is significant to you.” Or use “Mind/Body/Soul” check in.

- Meeting Topic - hand out the Smart Church Chalice Circle article for this session. (this may also be done ahead of time)
- Ask the questions that are provided. These questions are meant as a way of simulating deep reflection and thoughtful sharing. Each person has an uninterrupted time to share what comes up for him/her in response to the reading and questions.
- There should be time for discussion after all have shared. You may wish to have a talking stick of some sort to remind the group who is speaking.
- Covenant should be upheld.
- Check-out - Each person briefly states what they are feeling as the meeting draws to a close. One word of how they are at the moment.
- Closing Words from the Topic (poem, quotation, etc.) - one is provided, however you may choose something different if it speaks to you and seems appropriate for the topic.
- Extinguish the chalice/candle and sound a chime (and other possible closing ritual if the group chooses including songs or group hug).
- Group Business. This may include: service projects; date, time, and location of next meeting; other.
- At the first meeting determine if members would like to receive the Smart Church Articles for the next sessions in advance of the group times, and if so, how to best receive the information.
- At the first meeting ask if it is okay to share contact information with group members. If okay, arrange to provide a contact list for each group member.



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## The Congregational Covenant - First Session (done at the beginning of every new set of Smart Church Chalice Circles)

Does your congregation already have a covenant? If so please use it in your Chalice Circles for this first session. But use it in a very real way. Here is an example of a congregational covenant:

We, the members of the Harmony Congregation, covenant:

- To extend a warm welcome, generous hospitality, and loving acceptance to all people,
- To keep the wellbeing of the whole community in minds and hearts,
- To practice caring for one another,
- To contribute to our shared mission,
- To practice mutual responsibility, shared ministry and leadership,
- To set and uphold healthy boundaries,
- To engage in direct, respectful communication and practice deep listening,
- To honor and celebrate differences.

In the spirit of humility, openness and vulnerability thus do we pledge to uphold this covenant.

**If your congregation has a written covenant** - the first session of every set of Smart Church Chalice Circles will consist of:

- Chalice lighting / Chimes / Silence
- Give out your congregation's covenant. Make sure that everyone in the circle has a copy (like the one above)
- Read it together, out loud
- Check in
- Food (optional)
- Ask:
  - ❖ What do we mean by *to extend a warm welcome, generous hospitality, and loving acceptance to all people?*
  - ❖ Go line by line. through the congregational covenant.
  - ❖ How do we uphold this covenant?
  - ❖ Is there anything missing that we, as a group would like to add?
  - ❖ Capture additions
  - ❖ If something comes up about not being able to abide by the original covenant - remind them that this is not the place to rewrite the congregational covenant. Rather we are here to move deeper into it. There will be other opportunities for them to contribute to a congregational covenant rewrite.
- Discussion
- Check-out

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- Closing Words
  - Extinguish the chalice/Chimes/Silence
  - Group Business.
  - Determine if members would like to receive the Smart Church Articles for the next sessions in advance of the group times, and if so, how to best receive the information.
  - Ask if it is okay to share contact information with group members. If okay, arrange to provide a contact list to each group member.

**If your congregation does not have a written covenant** - the first session of every set of Smart Church Chalice Circles will consist of:

- Chalice lighting/Chimes/Silence
- Read a covenant from our gray Hymnal
- Check in
- Food
- For the topic we will be talking about how we will be together. Ask:
  - ❖ What do we need to have present in the group so that we feel safe?
  - ❖ What do we need to have present in the room so that we can share deeply?
  - ❖ What are the promises we need to make to each other?
  - ❖ Capture these concepts
  - ❖ As a group write them into a covenant.
- Discussion
- Check-out
- Closing Words
- Extinguish the chalice/Chimes/Silence
- Group Business.
- Determine if members would like to receive the Smart Church Articles for the next sessions in advance of the group times, and if so, how to best receive the information.
- Ask if it is okay to share contact information with group members. If okay, arrange to provide a contact list to each group member.

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Smart Church Chalice Circles  
Unitarian Universalism  
Session #2

## The Smart church

### All the Difference

*I call that church free which enters into the covenant with the ultimate source of existence. It binds together families and generations, protecting against the idolatry of any human claim to absolute truth or authority.*

- James Luther Adams

For a long time we thought that we should focus on how Unitarian Universalism was like other religions, what all religions had in common. When we taught about our faith we looked for the likenesses we shared with other faith traditions. For a long time people who came into Unitarian Universalism defined themselves by what they were not. I am not a Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, Baptist, or I am a recovering Catholic, etc. For a long time we have been unable to teach Unitarian Universalism. We suffered from the Buddhist idea that if you name something as big as God you diminish it. So how could we say what Unitarian Universalism is without diminishing it? And yet, how can we have deep discussions about our faith with one another, let alone with people of other faiths, if we cannot talk about what Unitarian Universalism is?

That is the struggle isn't it? What is Unitarian Universalism? What is the truth, the wisdom and transcendent value at its center? What makes it different? What makes it great? What makes it important? What makes it worth your dedication? What makes it worth sharing? What is in Unitarian Universalism that we hang onto in times of joy and times of sorrow?

**Unitarian Universalism is a living tradition.** As a living tradition we are asked over and over again to reexamine our path, our faith, the truth, our assumptions and our work. Do we love deeply enough? Are we not merely tolerant but accepting? Is our service, service to others or for our own glory? Who cannot hear us because of the way we speak? What is the next challenge - mine, yours, ours? Are we supportive and not enabling? Are we kind, trusting, forgiving, humble? I know that change can be exhausting because there is so much of it, all the time. But - *life is change, how it differs from the rocks.* - Jefferson Airplane. Because ours is a living tradition we must hit the refresh button often.

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**Unitarian Universalism is a pluralistic faith.** We do not believe there is only one way or one path to truth and goodness. Rather all paths that lead to a loving heart are good paths. There is no fundamentalism in Unitarian Universalism. There is not one right way. We covenant to walk in the ways of love. We covenant to uphold our values and support one another in the struggle. We covenant to build the world we dream about. We covenant to accept different ideas and theologies and to allow room for doubt.

**Unitarian Universalism is a covenantal, not a creedal faith.** In our living tradition there is no orthodoxy. Therefore, there is no demand for people to adhere to one way of relating to the holy, the divine, or the wonder of creation. Unitarian Universalism does not insist that to be a part of the faith all must be bound together by belief. Rather we are bound by our deep and abiding promise to support one another and care for the world. We are bound by love to serve.

**Unitarian Universalism is a faith that teaches that revelation is open and ongoing.** We do not believe that revelation is sealed. We believe that each of us has a relationship with the divine and anyone can be touched by divine thought and inspiration. We believe that all are worthy and all are saved. We believe that life is sacred - all life. We are not waiting to be saved. We think that what we have here and now is important and that how we live together on this lovely little planet matters. Everything is holy.

These four pillars of Unitarian Universalism speak to the difference between our faith tradition and some others. While we have much in common with what is at the heart of all great religions (love), we differ with each on at least one of these Unitarian Universalist ways of manifesting love in the here and now. Our good news of hope and love is worth sharing. Our way of living out that hope and love is also worth sharing. It needs to be given away with open and generous hearts.

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## Questions for “All the Difference”

1. Are you a life-long Unitarian or Universalist or Unitarian Universalist?
2. How do you feel about your religious upbringing?
3. What do you treasure about your religious upbringing? What if anything do you want to leave behind?
4. What does UnitarianUniversalism mean to you?
  - ❖ Do we love deeply enough?
  - ❖ Are we not merely tolerant but accepting?
  - ❖ Is our service, service to others or for our own glory?
  - ❖ Who cannot hear us because of the way we speak? Because of the music in worship? Because we have not made room for them?
  - ❖ What is the next challenge - mine, yours, ours?
  - ❖ Are we supportive and not enabling?
  - ❖ Are we kind, trusting, forgiving, humble?
5. What do you think Unitarian Universalism is called to be in the world?
6. What is our biggest struggle: Covenant? Pluralism? Open revelation? Being a living tradition?
7. Which one of these Unitarian Universalist pillars speaks to you? Gives you hope? Is a comfort? Is a joy?

### Closing Words

Theodore Parker

Be ours a religion which, like sunshine, goes everywhere;  
its temple, all space;  
its shrine, the good heart;  
its creed, all truth;  
its ritual, works of love;  
its profession of faith, divine living.

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Smart Church Chalice Circles  
Unitarian Universalism  
Session #3

## The Smart church

### Covenantal Not Creedal Faith

*Covenant is a foundational part of Congregational Polity and the Free Church. Where creeds or doctrines hold other faiths together, we are held together by our promises to one another.*

*"Covenant" is Latin for "come together" and means a "solemn agreement" or "promise from the heart" regarding a course of action between parties. - UUA website - <http://www.uua.org/governance/covenant/>*

#### **Covenant, Gloucester, MA (modified)**

Mindful of truth ever exceeding our knowledge,  
Love and compassion ever exceeding our practice.  
Reverently, we covenant together,  
Beginning with ourselves as we are,  
To share the strength of integrity  
And the heritage of the spirit,  
In humanity's unending quest  
For justice, love and human wholeness.

A Covenant is a statement of what we hold most valuable, like the example above. Whether your congregation has gone through a formal Covenant writing process or not, every congregation that is a member of our Association is part of our covenantal faith community. Look in the front of our hymnal: "We the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association covenant to affirm and promote:" the seven principles and the six sources of wisdom. Our UUA Covenant insists on respect, justice, inclusivity, responsibility and open-mindedness.

A Covenant is a deep and abiding promise of how we will be with one another. A Covenant says, "Come enter into this community. Here is how I will treat you. Here is how I expect to be treated."

A Covenant is not a creed. A creed is a statement of belief. We do not tell people what to believe. Membership in our faith communities does not depend on nor demand that individuals adhere to a certain set of beliefs in order to belong. However, there is

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responsibility in belonging. Our responsibility is that each of us will try to live a balanced, boundaried life. We will uphold our Covenant. We will be together in a deep community. We will commit ourselves to the common good.

A Covenant is a tool that can help us to call ourselves and each other back to our best selves. It is a relational promise and a statement of being. It helps us to set healthy boundaries so our relationships and faith communities can grow and blossom. Covenants can and will be broken. There are instances when a Covenant (like any relationship) is broken so badly that there is little hope for repair, but that is rare.

Unitarian Universalist congregations must be faith communities that are open and safe, where people who are fighting the good fight of liberty and justice for all can enter, lay their burdens down, be nourished and supported so that they can go back out into the fray.

We must be able to behave together like Unitarian Universalists, demanding the respect we deserve and setting healthy boundaries that maintain the common good. Sloppy boundaries, or broken boundaries gone unchecked, lead us down a path of destruction and abuse. Though we have broken our vows a thousand times, we must again and again call ourselves back into covenant and try, try again. Ours is no caravan of despair – *Come, yet again, Come.*



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## Questions for “Covenantal Not Creedal Faith”

1. What are your congregation’s demands for membership?
2. What are member rights and responsibilities?
3. How do you commit yourself to the common good of the faith community?
4. What are the things that we should not tolerate?
5. How do you feel about the word covenant?
6. What is a covenant?
7. How do we uphold covenant?
8. What happens when covenant is broken?
9. Can we be Unitarian Universalists without covenant?
10. What should be at the heart of our covenant?
11. Where do we practice living in covenant? Where do we not practice living in covenant?

Closing Words - From Tapestry of Faith - <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/welcome/session2/sessionplan/118151.shtml>

Invite the participants to hold hands and form a circle. Ask them to repeat the following lines after you. Say the lines slowly:

We are thankful.

We are thankful to be here.

We are thankful to be here, together.

We are thankful to be here, together, now.

Then ask one person to very gently squeeze the hand of the person to their left, and have that person continue to pass the squeeze until the squeeze has returned to the person who started it. Tell the person who started the squeeze to signal that it has returned to them by raising their arms, still holding hands with the people on either side. When this happens, instruct everyone to raise their clasped hands, together. If you like, suggest a word for them to say at this moment, like "Good-bye!" or "Shalom," or the name of this session's intangible gift — covenant!

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Smart Church Chalice Circles  
Unitarian Universalism  
Session #4

## The Smart church

### The Season of Light

*It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.* - Peter Benenson

The reason for the season is the human fear that the sun will leave and never return. In the northern hemisphere the sun, the giver of life, light, warmth and sustenance spends less and less time with us as we approach the Winter Solstice. In the northern hemisphere the dwindling days reach their climax between Dec 20 and 22. In the southern hemisphere it happens between June 20 - 22. The days grow shorter and shorter and colder and colder. Darkness is scary! All humans are afraid of the dark. If the sun does not return to the sky our children starve. Can you even begin to imagine how it must have seemed to our ancestors, the dwindling days, the long nights and the cold. There are more holidays that happen around solstice than any other time of year. Our ancestors built monuments to count the days and watched the sun, I am sure with great fear, hope and anticipation. Some of these monuments were built in hopes of trapping the sun - tethering it to the Earth. Some were built as temples but all seem to watch and mark the days. All seem to try to help us control the uncontrollable.

The discovery of how to make fire must have seemed like a great human triumph. With this discovery we could at least fight off the encroaching cold and darkness. Gas lamps once lit our homes and villages - that also must have been a great leap out of the darkness.

The very first town in the United States to be lit by electric lights was Wabash, Indiana on March 31, 1880. People came from miles around to watch. What must that experience have been like? To have moved from the dark into the light in one moment. It must have seemed miraculous. I am sure people prayed and were moved to tears.

More than a century later as we move into the time of the Winter Solstice we should take some time to pray, meditate and think about just how lucky we are. Yes, things move too fast and it is hard to keep up with all the changes. Yes, there is great struggle in the world and so there is a great temptation to think that ours is the only generation to struggle. We are still not feeding all the children. We are still mongering hate and cursing one another. We are still at

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war. But we join the ranks of our ancestors - there has always been great struggle in the world.

If we were watching from a distance, would we see the struggle that is going on now as all that different from what humans have always struggled with, forever? My colleague Susan Smith and I often say that we appreciate the struggle. We say this about the struggle that happens for Unitarian Universalists as we wrestle with our individual faith development. But human struggle, of all kinds, is important. The struggle to be born. The struggle to become as fully human and as alive and aware as possible. Then, finally, the struggle to let go of this life and move on. Struggle is what life is all about.

We may fool ourselves once in a while, like our ancestors, thinking we can tether the sun and control the universe but it is just us fooling ourselves so that we won't be afraid of the dark. The only thing we have control over is our own behavior. Luckily we have companions in the struggle. We are all in this together and that is what should give us great comfort.

In this season of love and light - be a light unto the world. Happy Holidays.

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## Questions for “Season of Light”

1. What do you take joy in at this time of the years?
2. What family traditions do you hold dear?
3. What are the traditions that your congregation has that you hold dear?
4. What is the greatest gift you were ever given?
5. What is the greatest gift you ever gave?
6. What does it mean to be afraid of the dark?
7. What would it be like to be a light unto the world?

Closing: From The UUA Worship Web - <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditations/154764.shtml>

### **Prayers: “Christmas Eve Prayer”**

[Sara Eileen LaWall](#)

Please join me in the spirit of prayer followed by a full minute of meditative silence.

Gods and Goddesses of darkness and light, Spirit of life and love:

We come together on this sacred night to awaken ourselves  
to the joy of Christmas

To the miracles of life

The birth of a baby

The rise of the sun once more

The magic of this earth, of Mother Nature herself

The love of one another

This Christmas myth calls us to remember

To remember that the ordinary can become extraordinary

To remember that any child, our own children,  
can become great prophets,

teachers, leaders of nations,

saviors even, not of souls but of lives,

working to end the ills and suffering in our world

“So the challenging thing becomes

Not to look for miracles, but finding where there isn’t one”\*

This is our prayer

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We give thanks for our many blessings  
We are reminded this night to share our blessings  
with as many people as possible,  
To consider that even the smallest gift,  
the smallest effort can make a difference in someone's life,  
in the world  
For this is the season of giving  
This Christmas Myth reminds us that the tradition of giving gifts  
symbolizes divinity  
When we give we honor the divine in each other,  
We acknowledge the common link among us all,  
The common ancestral blood we all share  
The blood that is meant to unite us once and for all  
This is our prayer

We pray for peace, that war may end  
We pray for food, that none may go hungry  
We pray for forgiveness, that our world may begin to heal  
We pray for dignity and worth,  
respect and love,  
liberty, justice and equality for all

But this prayer alone is insufficient  
We pray knowing that this prayer holds the thought  
in the forefront of our mind  
This prayer focuses our energy on the needs of the world  
But we know that this prayer also requires action  
and with this very prayer we resolve to act  
To seize the moment  
To seize our own power

This Christmas myth reminds us  
That this moment is precious  
This moment is holy  
This moment is powerful  
This moment is love  
This moment is full of hope and possibility  
This moment is all we need  
This is our Christmas prayer  
On this silent and holy night, Amen.

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\*Quoted line from *Holy Now* by Peter Mayer, whose song served as inspiration for this prayer.

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Smart Church Chalice Circles  
Unitarian Universalism  
Session #5

## The Smart church

### Transcendent

*“To have humility is to experience reality, not in relation to ourselves, but in its sacred independence. It is to see, judge, and act from the point of rest in ourselves. Then, how much disappears, and all that remains falls into place.*

*In the point of rest at the center of our being, we encounter a world where all things are at rest in the same way. Then a tree becomes a mystery, a cloud a revelation, each man a cosmos of whose riches we can only catch glimpses. The life of simplicity is simple, but it opens to us a book in which we never get beyond the first syllable.”*

— [Dag Hammarskjöld](#), *Markings*

We are the people of the promise and the struggle. The promise is our covenant. As a covenantal not a creedal faith, our covenant is to support one another and to receive support as we struggle to become more fully human. Our covenant is to call ourselves and one another back into covenant when we falter. Our covenant is to recognize all people who are working for the just and loving world as partners in creation.

Therefore, Unitarian Universalism is a faith that supports human development. It is a spiritual discipline that asks us to continue becoming, insisting that we not allow ourselves to get stuck in any one stage, no matter how comfortable it is.

There are many aspects to our struggle. Some of us struggle with holy language. Holy language is what Michael Dowd calls, night language. (for more about Michael Dowd and Connie Barlow go to: <http://www.thegreatstory.org>) Night language is the language of poetry and holy books. It is not the language of science and law. We struggle with holy words because they are not concrete, nor exact. But to struggle is our job. The struggle is everything. To get in the way of the struggle of another is to halt their development. Becoming can be painful and when it is, the pain is necessary. For others to rush in and try to fix it, is wrong. Our job as Unitarian Universalists is to support and love the individual as they struggle. Our job is not to stop their struggle or to let them stop ours.



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What happens if you open a chrysalis? If you cut it open do you see recognizable pieces of butterfly and caterpillar all mixed up together? If you “help” a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis what happens to the butterfly? Yes, it dies. The struggle is what prepares it for flight and life. Too much help and you kill the creature you were trying to help. Human beings need struggle, too, and Unitarian Universalism supports that struggle.

What does transcendence mean to us as Unitarian Universalists?

While I am not an expert in all the world’s great religions, in my struggle with my own becoming I have learned that I love to explore religion. My understanding of the Christian faith’s definition of transcendence is that it is one side of a polarity that describes the nature of God. The other side of that polarity is immanence. In this case a polarity is two things of equal importance that must exist simultaneously. Transcendence is the nature of God that is not part of physical reality. It is the *sacred independence* that is spoken of above and outside of ourselves. Immanence is the nature of God that is part of our physical reality. In other words this definition of God is - that God exists both in us and our reality (immanent nature) and outside of us and our reality (transcendent nature) at the same moment. This is a hard definition for me to argue with - in many ways it is very like Process Theology, the theology that says we are all in this together. There is more to reality and outside of reality than we can comprehend. We are all changing. Every change, changes everything. There is no plan and we will all be different and surprised by what happens. All of this (including us) is God. That’s another definition of God that is difficult for me to argue against.

In many ways the quote that I began with seems to me to be very Buddhist - that if we can come to a place of simple rest and humility we can transcend all of the stuff that gets in our way and keeps us from truly experiencing each breath and each second of our lives.

The beginning quote starts with humility. Humility - the letting go of the need to be always the expert, always correct. Humility - to admit that I do not know everything. To face the fact that I need to know more. To freely admit the reality that I cannot do this alone, knowing that I can only do my small portion of what must be done. Humility is what we need in order to come to what transcendence really means to us. Transcendence - that part of reality that does not live inside of us. That which is in all the rest of creation. That which, if we are lucky, we might experience a small piece of. Transcendence, to experience everything as a miracle.

*“There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.” - Albert Einstein*

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## Questions for “Transcendent”

1. How do you relate to the definition of transcendent? Immanent?
2. How do you relate to God?
3. Where has your spiritual struggle taken you?
4. How is Unitarian Universalism a spiritual discipline?
5. If you were a better Unitarian Universalist tomorrow than you are today, what would you need to change?
6. How do you relate to humility? Simplicity?
7. How are we all in this together?

Closing - gray Hymnal # 698

Have everyone sit in silence - ring a bell (tibetan cymbals or singing bowl) three times.

Play - either the song (you can purchase from iTunes) or use this video link.

Peter Mayer's *Everything is Holy Now* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CaGnQc5Vmhs>

*Take Courage Friends*, by Wayne B. Arnason

Take courage friends.

The way is often hard, the path is never clear,  
and the stakes are very high.

Take courage.

For deep down, there is another truth:  
you are not alone.

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Smart Church Chalice Circles  
Unitarian Universalism  
Session #6

## The Smart church

### Becoming

*Live your beliefs and you can turn the world around.* - Henry David Thoreau

Happy New Year! This is the time of year when we make resolutions and promises to ourselves about what we will do in the coming months. What have you promised yourself this year? Will you lose weight? Will you exercise more? Will you be more patient, kind, compassionate? What about your faith development? Did you think of it? Did you make a promise to yourself to grow and deepen your faith?

Unitarian Universalism is an amazing spiritual discipline. How does it inform your personal faith development? I know that my faith supports me as I struggle toward my own becoming. I know that I will change. I know that my faith will forgive me when I miss the mark. I know that my faith leaves room for doubt.

*Faith keeps many doubts in her pay. If I could not doubt, I should not believe.* - Henry David Thoreau.

I know that I am responsible for my own becoming and my own learning. I am responsible for the mistakes I make. I know I need to ask for forgiveness. I know that I need to learn the lessons my mistakes have to teach me and that I must be forgiving with the mistakes of others. This is the promise part of our faith - we promise to be supportive, in genuine honest relationship, responsible for ourselves and respectful of others as we all struggle to become.

We are also the people of the many paths. We know that there are many ways to come to a good heart and that having a good heart will help you to serve the world. We have six sources of wisdom that inform our personal faith development. We honor the experience of the holy, wise words and deeds, all the world regions, Jewish, Christian, Humanist and Earth-centered teachings. We know that this is not an exhaustive list and that we may need to add to our sources in the future.

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We covenant with one another to honor our sources and uphold our Seven Principles. We end our covenant by saying, *'Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision...'*

For a long time it has been difficult for us to define ourselves and the faith. We thought that by naming what we are and what we believe at this moment, we somehow diminish Unitarian Universalism. That time has past - we must talk openly about our deepest values. The transcendent values at the center of the faith that are as large as God. We could argue that it is God. For me I believe that we humans are part of and partners in creation. God is everything and everything is God. We are God and God is us. *Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads.* - Henry David Thoreau. Or *We are stardust. We are golden. And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden.* - Joni Mitchell.

We are responsible for our own behavior and for what happens next in the story - our portion of the human story. We are not victims of the past. If we take what we have learned and use it to inform what we do next, we will write happy chapters in the book of creation.

*Humanism tells us that whatever our philosophy of the universe may be, ultimately the responsibility for the kind of world we live in is up to us.* - Leland Waldrip.

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## Questions for “Becoming”

1. How will you change in the next year? Did you make any resolutions?
2. How will you deepen your faith?
3. What will the chapter, that we are responsible for writing, be about?
4. What are the values that we, as Unitarian Universalist partners in creation, should be living out in the world?
5. What is it that the world needs from the faith and each of us?
6. How do we carry our values out into the world and do no less than turn the world around?
7. How is your own becoming?

Closing: Helen Keller

*“I am only one,  
but still I am one.  
I cannot do everything,  
but still I can do something;  
and because I cannot do everything,  
I will not refuse to do something that I can do.”*

Go and change one thing that needs to be changed.

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Smart Church Chalice Circles  
Unitarian Universalism  
Session #7

## The Smart church

### Generous Spirit

*We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.* Winston Churchill

Recently I have had several conversations with my granddaughters, who are 9 and 6, about the meaning of generosity. What does it mean to have a generous spirit? I find it interesting how clear my thinking can become on topics once I have had a discussion with the girls.

Because of these conversations I have come to several pieces of what I consider to be truth. If one is to have a truly generous spirit, it is a way of life. It is alive in us. When one becomes generous in spirit, happiness comes along with it. You cannot mistrust, blame, hate, behave disrespectfully or cruelly if you are truly living in your generous spirit. And amazingly you get what you give. The universe repays generosity with generosity. Generosity is catching and so is fear and hope and hate and love, etc. So what is it we want to help the world catch? *What the world needs now is love, sweet love. That's the only thing that there's just too little of.* - Jackie DeShannon We can only build the world we dream about if we are generous of spirit.

My husband, Bob, and I took our eldest granddaughter, Juliet, with us on vacation this year to the beautiful canyons in the western part of our United States. Generosity came up over and over. It came up when we talked about the ancient Puebloan people that used to live at Mesa Verde. It came up when we talked about water, too much and not enough and how we share with the animals. It came up when we talked about feeding wild animals. It came up when we talked about the things that Juliet wanted to buy. The buying is a tangible or physical manifestation of our discussion and really the only way that Juliet could begin to understand, on a personal level, what we were talking about.

The conversation would go something like this. Juliet would say, "I want this." One of us would say, "What are we giving Chloe?" (Her 6-year-old sister). Juliet, "But I don't want Chloe to have everything that I have. I want some things that are just mine." Our reply, "We understand that but, Juliet, you got to come on this trip, fly in planes, see Mesa Verde, canyons, feed chipmunks, hike, picnic, swim and do all of the other things that happened on this summer adventure. What did Chloe get? We love to give you things that will light up your face. Is there a way that you could get great joy in giving Chloe things that she would

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love, that would light up her face?” Then we would discuss what it means to have a generous spirit. In many ways we came to the idea that it is very much like magic. If you give, with a generous heart, because it is the right thing to do, what would happen?

It took some time but Juliet finally came to a place where she was looking for beautiful things that would light up Chloe’s face. The very day that Juliet came to this understanding she had been hunting for rainbow Kokopelli dolls. She wanted a very specific kind of Kokopelli doll. She knew that Chloe wanted the same doll. We found one, only one. Juliet bought it for Chloe. Bob and I were very proud and told her so. Right afterwards a woman, who had been helping us look for the doll, went home and got a Kokopelli from her own collection and gave it to Juliet. It was amazing. It was everything we had talked about. We give because it is the right thing to do, not because we are expecting a reward. By doing the right thing, joy is poured back into our lives in so many ways. The doll was a very tangible representation of getting what you give. As time has gone on this summer she has come to the awareness that there is joy in the generosity itself.

When I found my first Unitarian Universalist congregation it felt like I had come home. I had come home to a place I never knew before. As a Unitarian Universalist, I could live a life of integrity and hope, a life where I would not have to compromise my values and ideals in order to be part of a faith community. How many of us feel this way? Yet much of the time we don’t relate our struggle to the struggle that others in the world might be experiencing. We have this wonderful piece of the truth, this wonderful accepting faith. Far too often we think that we have come to the end of our search. We have found our last answer instead of a path to a deeper life and understanding. When we find it, it is perfect and we don’t want anything to change, not one tiny little bit. Too often we treat it like a secret that we have found that we don’t want others to know about.

If we were generous we would deliberately create open space in our hearts and congregations that welcomes different people, experiences and possibilities. Paraphrasing Clinton Lee Scott, we would leave the doors and windows of our hearts and minds open in the chance that some stray truth might enter.

To share Unitarian Universalism freely we should be talking openly and often about it. We should practice deep listening and engage in calm respectful conversation about Unitarian Universalism whenever and wherever we can. We should delight in the opportunity to have these conversations. Not only with those who agree with us but with those who do not. Not to change people who disagree but rather to help them see us more clearly. Engaging in deep discussion only helps us to define our faith and understand who we are and articulate what it is to be a Unitarian Universalist. We should be emboldened UUs, steady as rocks, kind and unafraid.



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Unitarian Universalism is a spiritual discipline that very well could help to save the world. We are the people of the promise and the struggle. We are the people of the many paths. We support one another through the struggle to become and become and become yet again. We do not insist that people get stuck in one stage of faith development. In fact we urge people ever forward toward their best selves. It is not that we are dissatisfied with who we are at any given moment, it is just that we understand that we are never finished. We are works in progress. We are the people who believe in open revelation. We are the people who strive to grow faith communities where diversity and acceptance live and grow in harmony. In fact we know that without difference there can be no harmony. Generosity is at the heart of all of this. This is something of great value. This is something that each of us need, and so does the world. This is a message of hope and it needs to be present in our communities, countries and planet.

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## Questions for “Generous Spirit”

1. Is anyone in the group a born Unitarian, Universalist or Unitarian Universalist?
2. How do you relate to the statements, “When I found my first Unitarian Universalist congregation it felt like I had come home. I had come home to a place I never knew before.”
3. What would happen if we were generous with and about Unitarian Universalism?
4. What is it that Unitarian Universalism has to share with the world?
5. Is there a life saving message at the heart of our faith?
6. How do we support one another?
7. What is your Unitarian Universalist sound bite?
8. Do you think there is one more person in your town that needs Unitarian Universalism?
9. Are you comfortable talking openly about Unitarian Universalism?
10. What do you need to know more about?

Closing:

Jacob Needleman - *Money and the Meaning of Life*

*The subject is love and giving. Do we ever really give anything, whether love or money or an object or time, without, however subtly, claiming something in return? Have we ever been on the receiving end of a pure gift, where we did not feel the slightest need to pay something back? Is such an exchange even possible or desirable - between people or in nature or, if one thinks in spiritual terms, between God and an individual human being?*

*And if there is such a thing as a pure gift, what is our response to it? What could it mean simply to accept such a gift as purely as it is offered?*

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Smart Church Chalice Circles  
Unitarian Universalism  
Session #8

## The Smart church

### Trust

*A little girl and her father were crossing a bridge. The father was kind of scared so he said:*

*"Sweetheart, please hold my hand so that you don't fall into the river."*

*The little girl said: "No, Dad. You hold my hand."*

*"What's the difference?" asked the puzzled father.*

*"There's a big difference," she replied. "If I hold your hand and something happens to me, chances are that I may let your hand go. But if you hold my hand, I know for sure that no matter what happens, you will never let my hand go."*

*In any relationship, the essence of trust is not in the bind, but in the bond. So hold the hand of the person whom you love rather than expecting them to hold yours... - unknown*

It is not the bind, it is in the bond. Bonds are forged in trust as the story above illustrates. Unitarian Universalism was birthed by brave people making a bond to support, care for and challenge each other to be the very best that they could be. Our founders bonded together entering into the struggle of becoming fully human, as one faith, practicing love. Did our association begin in trust? Did we hold the hand of those we love and move into our future fearlessly or were we fearful and mistrustful?

I recently heard my colleague Sue Sinnamon talk about her understanding of paradigm shift. I loved how she began because she said that she has always struggled with this term because of the way people use it. I too have struggled with this over-used term. People say it when they mean change of any kind, in attempt to make all change a whole new way of thinking. That use of paradigm shift seems like an S-A-T phrase for "change" and I always think simpler is better. The way Sue talked about it is that in a paradigm shift we have no example, no roadmap. We are on the edge of something totally new and scary. It is an uncomfortable place to be.

Studies tell us that the church of tomorrow will be without walls, multigenerational and multicultural. When we say this to congregations, leaders immediately ask for an example of a successful congregation practicing this new way of doing church. They want one that is

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their size, struggling with the same issues and from their culture. They want a roadmap and the list of things to avoid. There is no road sign that says “The Right Way”. Welcome to the edge. At the edge it is always better to have someone you love and trust holding your hand.

In *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* \* by Patrick Lencioni, he talks about the fact that teams often make the mistake of not spending enough time building trust. Trust must be the foundation of building any successful, high functioning team, corporation or congregation. If we can build trust, not in the way that says we will never make a mistake but with full knowledge that we will sometimes head down the wrong path, make bad choices and certainly mistakes. Trust helps us to stay at the table and learn from the mistakes. It is only with trust as our foundation that we can achieve creative conflict, be totally committed, held accountable for behavior and outcomes and ultimately achieve our ends.

So how do we build trust? To build trust we must be trustworthy. We must be genuine, honest and humble. We must be vulnerable. We must ask for forgiveness when we mess up and forgive others when they mess up. We must live our covenant with the entire world, not just the people we agree with. We must stop fighting over petty unimportant things and focus on the values at our core. We must not take things personally. Finally, we must stay at the table and practice.

We are the leaders we have been waiting for and now is our time. Let’s lay the foundation of trust beneath us and move into a place of creative conflict. Let’s dare to be great. Let’s spread love and hope everywhere. Trust me, we can do it.

\* TED talk by Patrick Lencioni - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sqvWEI1CVg>

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## Questions for “Trust”

1. Are we a trusting people?
2. How is this a great adventure?
3. Have you ever known a leader who lead in a vulnerable way? What does that mean?
4. Is trust always naive?
5. Is there great trust in our congregation?
6. How might we build trust? Where would we begin?

Closing: Margurite Mills

Make a circle.

Ritual: The leader raises their right hand and says, “I put my hand in yours, so that together we can do the things that I cannot do by myself.” and then takes the left hand of the person next to them.

Then the next person raises their right hand and says, “I put my hand in yours, so that together we can do the things that I cannot do by myself.” and then takes the left hand of the person next to them.

Go around the circle until it comes back to the leader.

All together - Raise your hands up and say, “We trust we can do it.”

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Smart Church Chalice Circles  
Unitarian Universalism  
Session #9

## The Smart church

### Conflict

*Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict -- alternatives to passive or aggressive responses, alternatives to violence. - Dorothy Thompson*

*Don't handicap your children by making their lives easy. - Robert A. Heinlein*

Human beings need to be challenged in order to thrive. There is an old Star Trek episode where a nonhuman entity has been keeping a man alive and safe for a long time and can't understand why he is not thriving and happy. In the movie Star Man the alien says, "*You (humans) are at your best when things are at their worst.*"

Carl Jung, in his idea of the collective unconscious, thought that human beings go through periods of collective change or evolution when something extraordinary is possible. He thought that over and over again we choose the path we will take. In 1913 he thought that we were at one of these liminal moments and we chose destruction.

Are we always on the verge of something extraordinary happening? Maybe so, but for some time now I have felt like there is something extraordinary happening. I am sure that it is partially where I am in my own faith development. But that can't be all of it because something - and I use the word "magical" - happens when a group of people get into a room and agree to work together in trust on something deep. Where I call it magic, Jung might call it the collective unconscious. We are so much more together than we are apart.

This spring I have spoken to leaders in 20 different congregations in our region who are sad because of the struggles that their congregation is going through. Please know that this is not an overly large number. Spring often brings forth new life and congregational struggles. Life, after all, is a struggle and making it easy renders it meaningless. Spring is often the time we begin work, in earnest, on staff transitions. Spring is when we report our pledge figures and reestablish our covenant with our Association. Spring is a renewing of energy and a time for looking forward. Spring is a time of change and so we find ourselves often in conflict.

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What is the foundational, fundamental value that keeps us in a state of creative, rather than destructive, conflict? What is it that we must foster in our culture in order to have an alternative to violence?

As I have said, I believe it is trust. When we find ourselves in times of trouble, if we hold trust close and continue to lead from a place of vulnerability and strength, we will better help our community find its way.

Please understand that I do not mean that we ever allow ourselves to be bullied or abused. The genuine response to abuse, in any form, is to confront it for what it is and use established processes to take it out of the system. To be honest is to be vulnerable. To be in covenant, we must trust and be honest with ourselves and each other. We are not in genuine relationship if we are not behaving in a genuine manner. Therefore, when we are feeling bullied we name that and find the correct action that will make it stop. When trust is established on any team or fostered in any congregation as a cultural norm then we can be in creative, rather than destructive, conflict. We will want to stay at the table, in the struggle, being our genuine selves until the path becomes clear. Once the path is clear we take action, lovingly. We commit our genuine selves to the task. We hold ourselves, first, and then others, accountable as we blissfully struggle toward our collective goal.

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## Questions for “Conflict”

1. Are we conflict avoidant?
2. Do we confront bullying? Do we tell people to stop?
3. What does our first principle really mean? *The worth and dignity of every human being.*
4. How are we, as individuals, held accountable to our congregation?
5. How are congregations held accountable to the Association?
6. What does doubt do for us? When is it good? When is it bad?

Closing: Hymnal # 637

### **A Litany of Atonement** - by Robert Eller-Isaacs

For remaining silent when a single voice would have made a difference,  
*we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.*

For each time that our fears have made us rigid and inaccessible,  
*we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.*

For each time that we have struck out in anger without just cause,  
*we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.*

For each time that our greed has blinded us to the needs of others,  
*we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.*

For the selfishness which sets us apart and alone,  
*we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.*

For those and for so many acts both evident and subtle which have fueled the illusion of  
separateness,  
*we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.*



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Smart Church Chalice Circles  
Unitarian Universalism  
Session # 10

## The Smart church

Ch - Ch - Changes

*Change is inevitable, pain is optional* - Edwin Friedman

I heard Gini Courter once say, "We struggle with any change that is not our idea." I think this is correct. There are changes that don't seem to bother us much, like mild changes in the weather or one day becoming another day or the phases of the moon. There are changes that we actually enjoy - vacation as a change of pace or buying a new outfit, new furniture, computer or smart phone. We kind of enjoy our birthdays as long as they are celebrated the way we like. Holidays change the norm and can be fun and a chance to catch up with family and friends.

So what are the changes that drive us over the edge, make us anxious, fearful and/or suspicious? I think they are the changes that others impose upon us. From the beginning of your Chalice Circle experience you knew that this was a ten month process. This is your last session and while this was the agreement that you made, there might be a temptation to say, "Gee now that we know and trust each other, let's just keep this Chalice Circle going. Why is there a need to mix this up? I am friends with everyone here. I don't want to stop. They aren't the boss of me!"

No one is telling you not to continue to be friends. Friends are wonderful - go make some more. The purpose of Small Group Ministry is to help individual people get to know many other individual people with whom we might be friends. If we choose to do Small Group Ministry and don't make room for the new people in our groups, we have defeated the whole purpose of Small Group Ministry. If we refuse to get to know anyone but the first group we are part of, we have defeated the purpose. If we become a closed group, a clique, a club, we defeat the purpose. There is always a temptation to stay too long at the party when one is having fun. It is always better to say good night and head down the road when one is leaving on a good note.

If we are to become we cannot remain comfortable. If we are to change, evolve and grow

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there will be many things that we will need to let go of. This is loss but what might we gain? If we cannot handle and learn from a change in the configuration of our Chalice Circles, how in the world can we handle and learn from the other changes in our lives?

We have discussed the fact that Unitarian Universalism is a faith that supports us in our struggle to become, urging us to go deeper and to strive to reach our full potential. It also challenges us to become. I suggest that people who can make friends with that challenge, who can enjoy every stage of their lives and remain open to all possibilities, will live the most fulfilled lives. To do this one must have vision, a sense of adventure, a sense of humor, flexibility and an appreciation of the struggle. We want to remain alive, awake and aware.

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## Questions for “Changes”

1. Do you feel tempted to continue this Chalice Circle group?
2. What is the loss in this change?
3. How do you handle change?
4. What do you fear?
5. What is your great adventure?
6. This is the last session with this Chalice Circle - what would you like to share? What has this experience meant to you?

Closing:

Please purchase “I am Willing” - Holly Near

Have your group listen to the song.

Sit in silence for at least one minute after. Ring a bell (tibetan cymbals or singing bowl) three times.

Raise join hands and sing the chorus.

I am open and I am willing  
For to be hopeless would seem so strange  
It dishonors those who go before us  
So lift me up to the light of change

Hugs all around.