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**CREDENTIALLED RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR**

**CANDIDATE, MASTER LEVEL**

**JANUARY 31, 2018**

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## EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

### *Competency 10: Leading Unitarian Universalist Religious Education into the Future*

Leadership is intimately tied to religious education by virtue of the nature of education itself; to educate is literally to “lead out.” In the context of religious growth and learning as Unitarian Universalists, providing leadership involves evolutionary, ever-adapting processes that integrate new teachings, especially from our Sources. The process for staying relevant and rich in modern times can be conceptualized as a cycle: listen to what is needed and where the energy for growth is, evaluate and assess, implement changes and incorporate new teachings, nurture and observe, listen again.

A critical duty in leading a religious education program is decision making about what is explicitly or implicitly offered in the learning experience, and what is left out (the null curriculum). Just as the book Simple Church (Rainer & Geiger, 2011) suggests for the whole church system, my role as a Director of Religious Education is to direct offerings to the current mission and vision of Unitarian Universalism and that of my congregation. Given the variety and breath of what may be offered, and the variety and breath of the means by which it may be offered, this responsibility requires careful ongoing attention and conscientious discernment. The capacity to develop religious education as a ministry that is shared, particularly with those for whom it is offered, also relies on such attention.

Leadership has inherent responsibilities for using power and authority wisely, and ongoing self-development goes hand in hand with these privileges. Internally, in order to model Unitarian Universalism in serving my community and the wider movement, I also need to be leading my own religious education program! Given the many biases, influences, and ingrained ways of thinking, feeling, and being in relationship every leader has, I know I cannot lead effectively without growing myself.

### **Formation**

#### *Structured learning experiences*

- ~ Safe Congregations, Guild of Interim Religious Educators, 2018 (15 hr.)
- ~ OMD Summer Institute Theme Speaker, *Beyond Lip Service*, 2017 (5 days)
- ~ UUMA Iroquois/ LREDA Seaway: Building Bridges 2017 (10 hr.)
- ~ Interim Religious Education Training, 2016 (15 hr.)
- ~ LREDA Fall Con: Theme-Based Ministry, 2015 (Co-lead)
- ~ UUA Large Conference: Governance and Ministry in Large Congregations, 2011 (3 days)
- ~ UUMA Iroquois/LREDA Seaway: Effective to Transformative Leadership, 2010 (10 hr.)
- ~ LREDA Fall Con: Models of Religious Education, 2004

- ~ Teacher Training Renaissance Module, 2002
- ~ Graduate Course: Learning Theories, University of Phoenix, 2015

#### *Life experiences*

- ~ Serving on the Accountability Creation Tool (ACT) Team, UUA
- ~ Surveying parents and providing opportunities to meet direct needs
- ~ Representing children, youth, and families at board meeting addressing institutional racism
- ~ Staff visioning, supervision, evaluations, hiring, and discipline
- ~ Serving as a liaison with social justice task forces
- ~ Curriculum writing and model adjustments
- ~ Curriculum tagging for themes in Tapestry of Faith
- ~ Serving as LREDA Seaway Chair and Vice Chair
- ~ Planning conference workshops and retreats for LREDA and UUA
- ~ Working as a Unit Leader for Girl Scouts of America and college tutor
- ~ Serving on the Parent-Teacher-Administration body at Morrisville-Eaton Central Schools

### **Application and Integration**

#### *Example 1: A Letter Requesting Accountability Resource*

In a few conversations with religious education colleagues last spring, following the UUA events related to institutional racism, I had expressed my conviction that we needed to try to honor the requests made especially by leaders of color. One of these was to audit the practices of the UUA, but who is the UUA? I had researched local organizations about what they would do for our congregation and asked if any dealt with the particulars of religious education. None had, just as I suspected they wouldn't. My colleagues urged me to write this letter, on our behalf, to seek support for auditing resources specific to religious education programs.

The letter resulted in the Accountability Creation Tool Team, which I was chosen to serve on, to develop an assessment tool for reflection and ongoing review in support of building a more inclusive multicultural community. Besides all that I have learned from serving on the team itself, I learned about the responsibility I have as a religious educator, to step up, speak up, and taken action.

*August 1, 2017*

*Jessica York*

*Interim Director of Ministries and Faith Development,  
Unitarian Universalist Association*

*Annie Scott*

*President,*

*Liberal Religious Educators Association*

*Dear Annie and Jessica,*

*While the UUA is moving forward with the Commission on Institutional Change and the racism audit, and the LREDA fall con will focus on Building Brave Spaces, we also long for ways to take action, encourage, and sustain accountability in our own programs in order to build diverse, multicultural Beloved Community.*

*In dialogue with one another, we have discovered a common drive to conduct ongoing assessment of our faith development programs because:*

*-External auditing organizations may not fully understand the dynamics of white supremacy culture specific to religious organizational structures such as worship, social justice, education and faith development, especially involving our children and youth.*

*- Our congregations vary in fiscal commitment for audits (especially addressing intersectionality), and response to the Teach In experience.*

*- Preparation for ongoing assessment and follow up planning that is in line with Unitarian Universalist language and in concert with the wider aims of marginalized groups in our denomination, seems critical to the broad transformation of our faith for the future.*

*- Our children, youth, and young adults of color are in the process of identity development and systemic oppression affects that process and those in marginalized groups, perhaps most significantly!*

*In short, as religious education professionals, we have a sense of urgency to be accountable for the ways in which our ministry is part of the perpetuation of white supremacy culture. Knowing that developing tools and resources for assessment and planning will take time on a congregational or denominational scale, we aim to collaborate now to get the ball rolling in the ways we have power to.*

*As leaders of our professional bodies, do you know of, or have you already imagined the creation of such assessment tools and guidance for good practices in auditing and sustained accountability specifically geared for religious educators? Please let us know how to access such resources! If not, do you have ideas about what process would best help us to move forward in collaboration with our professional organizations?*

*Our inclination is to do some ground work in educating ourselves more thoroughly by: looking at research and how audits or ongoing assessments are conducted, drawing from samples of what congregations and organizations have used, identifying tools that specifically address white supremacy characteristics, etc. And from there, begin to collaborate with each other and invite many voices in developing some usable assessment resources and processes, even if very simple for this church year.... These might include education on rationale, good practices in preparation and timing, tools that measure observable facts as well as perceptions, how to frame new strategies, planning, and review of initiatives.*

*As Dr. King said, "Faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase."*

*We are grateful for your consideration and leadership in every step...*

*Anne, Leah, and Sheila*

*Anne Kadlecek, Director of Lifespan Faith Development  
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Binghamton, NY*

*Leah Purcell, Director of Religious Education  
Albany Unitarian Universalist  
LREDA Board, Professional Development*

*Sheila Schuh, Director of Religious Education  
First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY*

#### *Example 2: Revision of Youth Group Model*

For years I have witnessed youth groups taking more or less freedom and responsibility for their programs, with varying degrees of collaboration with adult advisors and staff and varying degrees of engagement with Unitarian Universalist teachings, Principles, etc. Last summer, I collected a multitude of youth group information from my history of service and from a feedback session with our youth, in an effort to support a model that was: more in line with the rest of the RE program and mission, met the expressed needs for excellent programming without losing lots of time and irrespective of staff personalities, allowed a level of choice and enough support, and helped the youth reach their goals- especially for social action.

Youth received this "bucket system" with open arms and relief. At mid-year, they still love the model. Essentially, I categorized offerings by topical area and created a scaffolding to

ensure balanced program elements. Youth then selected what activities or events would fill each of the “buckets.” In this way, they also were able to see areas that they had left out, the null curriculum, and easily include them.

### **2017 YOUTH MINISTRY BUCKET LIST!**

#### **Worship** (Weekly)

The basic elements of theme-based worship:

Greeting or Deep Fuun, Music, Chalice Lighting, Mindfulness practice or Meditation, 6 Source or Soul Matters theme source, gratitudes. Other elements may include reflection, ritual, moment of inquiry, extinguishing, arts/movement, dyad sharing, spiritual practice, etc.

#### **Sexuality Education** OWL 10-12<sup>th</sup> grades (4 sessions)

12 sessions of OWL 10-12 are divided into 3 yrs. Youth will have extra time for issues related to current youth culture and healthy multiracial, multicultural perspectives.

**Social Action** 6 projects (At least one: UUA Issue, First U Task Force or project, off-site engagement)

Service projects, witness events, campaigns, community organizing, etc.

The First U Social Justice Task Forces include: Climate Change, Honduras Partnership, Black Lives Matter/Youth Lives Matter, Micro Finance. Ongoing projects at First U include: UU Schools Partnership and Back Pack, RAIHN, UUSC, and Connect and Breathe. Petition Sunday.

#### **UU Identity** 5 sessions

UU History- adventure, tour, interviews, games, movie, etc.

UU World- current events, debate, webinar, google hang out, online explorations

Big Questions Reflection- From Well Spring, wonder and wrestling with life’s big questions

Personality, Family and Your UU faith- Creative arts exploration of your spirituality and belonging related to your origins

Exploring Science- part of our Humanist Source, in depth look at how science is affecting our lives, world, and view

#### **Spiritual Practices**- 4 sessions

Ministerial Dessert- After the sermon convo with minister(s) or choose an activity

Teen Soul Matters- adventure or exercise on monthly theme, possibly cohorts

Interfaith Adventure- learning about another group’s wisdom and visiting

Spiritual Recharge- spiritual practices for stress and compassion – in church or out

**UU Principles in Teen Culture**- 4 sessions

Changing the World- Laws and Liberties- Dialogue, debate or fishbowl about a rule or norm viewed through UU Principles. (Practicing democratic process, including various sides)

Counter-cultural action- practicing low-risk resilience by honoring Natural Resources

Faith and Wellness- Extended group teach-in: guest speaker on teen challenges to wellness: drugs, alcohol, bullying, addiction, anxiety, depression, abuses and the safe keeping of your future

Gut Studio- teen brain science and practicing faithful choices in challenging and amazing moments

**Love and Justice Retreat** – 1 time every year

An intensive on right relations and building beloved community including a main focus with intersectional components. Includes skills in communication (NVC), power/equity education, and personal identity exploration.

Race/Ethnicity, Class, Abilities, Nationality

**Fundraising**- 2 sessions to raise funds for projects or organizations

**Nature or UU Excursion** 1 time a year

Cohort groups plan a UU adventure

**Bridging and Beyond Meet Up** : 1 time or more

Chance for sharing resources and experiences related to bridging out of youth group into young adulthood, including a parent component. Possible involvement with YA and parents of grads.

**Cons, Parties, Games, others!** Include one Young Adult/ Alumni crossover, 8<sup>th</sup> grade cross over

*Example 3: Teaching About Restorative Systems*

One of the most important concepts that a colleague and I created this slide to show, is that a continuum of practices can be employed in a restorative vs. punitive relational system. While I was speaking at OMD Summer Institute specifically about non-violence in our language as Unitarian Universalists, the application of the information was in support of using such practices to restore connection and covenant when broken. This helped youth and adults “get” the understanding that we are all empowered in the system to maintain the system, from the simple act of self-care to participating in a structured community conference.



Looking back, I would have spent more time on this continuum as unfortunately, the lack of congregational structures to address covenantal tensions, small and large, seems serious. Building skills for individual mindfulness and reflection, and compassionate communication to this end, seems essential for spiritual growth among us.



## Lenses

### *Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, Multiculturalism (ARAOMC)*

Besides taking the initiative to write the accountability letter above, I met with parents of children and youth of color, along with a youth and a young adult of color, to listen to what their needs were. Leadership has meant actively pursuing suggestions they made: forming a group for children and youth of color, forming a Soul Matters circle for people of color, and advocacy for a comprehensive plan and multicultural vision from the Board. I have continued to write curricula, learn about de-centering whiteness in worship and make changes wherever I can.

### *Technology*

One of the most important uses of technology in providing lay leadership for our program is the use of SignUpGenius. The tool has allowed me to track who has and who has not fulfilled a commitment to volunteer, and reach out to non-volunteers to help find a combination that may work for them. Our online registration allowed me to also ask parents up

front if they had interest in a group for children and youth of color, or additional group for environmental justice advocacy. I have also taken advantage of and contributed to online social media pages to share educational and worship resources to strengthen leadership for our own and other's programs.

## **LIBERAL THEOLOGIES**

### *Competency 11: Knowing and Teaching Our Diverse Theological Roots*

If we sing, “roots hold me close, wings set me free,” Unitarian Universalist religious education has to incorporate and celebrate the multitude of ways by which such liberation is and has been, possible. Unitarian and Universalist historical ways of articulating the power of relationship with the divine, and the covenantal tradition we now have which draws on communal liberation through mutual commitment, need to be taught in faith development. Specific liberation theologies that have shaped Unitarian Universalism hold a special place in faith development as well, due to their influence on our collective understandings and spiritual growth.

The Principle of affirming and promoting the free and responsible search for truth and meaning calls us to both teach about belief systems, and to invite wisdom about them through experiential learning and discernment. For example, religious education can explicitly teach about process theology by showing how the Sources are not fixed and static and that truth evolves over time. Exercises grounded in process theology, such as peace circle training or developing credo/ conscience statements, also serve to educate. Similarly, feminist theology can be taught as a way to understand the historical influence of women’s perspectives on the revision of the Principles, for example, and also taught in exercises examining consent, lifting up stories of goddesses, or worshipping in a circle.

For me, understanding “spiritual inheritance” is critical for the true responsibility of choice in beliefs and embodiment of one’s personal theology. Diversity in education involving deeper understanding of social, political, and economic oppressions empowers people to build a way forward that ever-expansive for all.

### **Formation**

#### *Structured learning experiences*

- ~ Theology in UU History, OMD Summer Institute Workshop, 2017 (10 hrs.)
- ~ Waking Up White, First Unitarian Church of Rochester, 2017 (2 hrs.)
- ~ Beyond the Binary, First Unitarian Church of Rochester (co-lead), 2017 (2 hrs.)
- ~ UUMA Iroquois/ LREDA Seaway: Building Bridges 2017 (15 hr.)
- ~ Mindfulness in Education: Teacher Training, 2015 (6 hr.)
- ~ LREDA Fall Con: Theme-Based Ministry, 2015 (Co-lead)
- ~ Transformations: Empowering Youth through Restorative Practices, PIRI, 2014 (8 hrs.)
- ~ UUMA Iroquois/LREDA Seaway Training: Science, Faith, and Values, 2006 (10 hrs.)

- ~ Renaissance Module: UU History, 2003
- ~ Renaissance Module: UU Philosophy, 1999
- ~ Graduate Course: UU History, Starr King School for the Ministry, 2017

### *Life experiences*

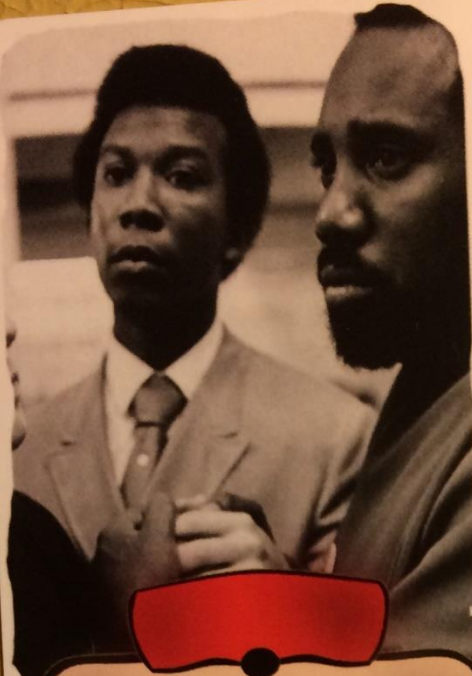
- ~ Serving on the Accountability Creation Tool (ACT) Team, UUA
- ~ Marching for women's rights, Black Lives Matter, etc.
- ~ Guest speaker meetings on refugees and racism
- ~ OWL panel guest meetings
- ~ Writing multiple Coming of Age curricula, including taking historical trips to Boston
- ~ Working on Soulful Sundown team at May Memorial UU Society
- ~ Working professionally in mental health settings serving various ages of children and youth
- ~ Being in community with many non-cisgender youth
- ~ Advocating for LGBTQ+ rights in PRIDE parades and politically
- ~ Learning yoga, Qi gong, chakra breath work, meditation, chanting
- ~ Advocating for legal boundaries between church and state
- ~ Leading Peace Circle processes for District YAC and local cases of covenant violation
- ~ Advocating for intergenerational liturgical calendar rituals
- ~ Performing memorial services

## **Application and Integration**

### *Example 1: Unitarian Universalist History Card Game*

I developed this game as part of my UU history course, to help educate children, youth, and adults about the various events that have influenced where we are today. Among the events which point to the theological ideas of our historical Unitarian and Universalist roots, are cards which directly express the influence of other liberal theologies such as when our Welcoming Congregation program was instituted, the Black Lives of Unitarian Universalists, and when feminist and earth-centered perspectives altered language in our UU Principles.

These were so warmly embraced by a recent gathering of ministers that I hope to publish them for sale soon!



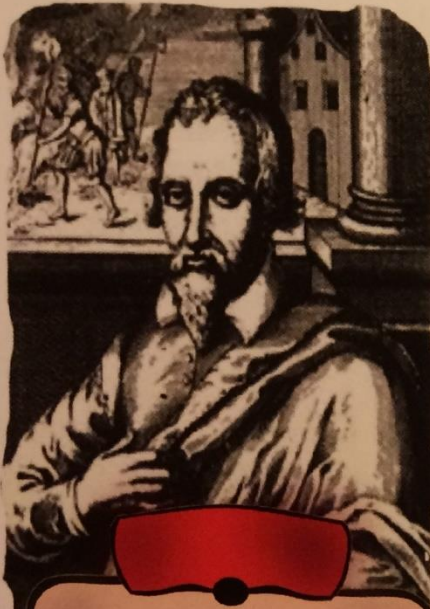
Black Empowerment Controversy spurs fiscal turmoil and painful racial division

REVOLUTION BY RESOLUTION:

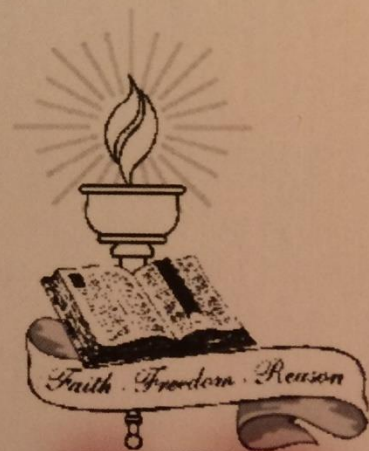
CELEBRATING YEARS  
OF WOMEN & RELIGION



Women and Religion Resolution passes at General Assembly



Michael Servetus (Miguel Serveto) publishes "On the Error of the Trinity"



American Unitarian Association forms; transcendentalists offer more humanistic view

### *Example 2: Intersectionality Session*

While young children may have difficulty defining the concept of different liberal theologies, they can certainly understand ideas such as social, political, and economic oppression. This lesson gives basic understanding of the multitude of identities that people have and how some identities can be singularly or collectively oppressed. In teaching that every person has different experiences based on their identities, and that extracting and oppressing aspects of someone's personhood denies them dignity, we lay the grounding for children to have a sense of the freedom sought through liberation theologies.

Children and leaders found this session hopeful and positive, even though it focused on serious racist imagery.

## **WORKSHOP ADVENTURE**

TERM: Fall      2017-2018

ROOM: My Sacred Stage

**INTRODUCTIONS AND WARM UP FUN:** Brief fun activity to get to know your group members a little.

Who are UU? Every person has a number of different names they may use to describe all of who they are...

Some based on our nationality or race or color: I am Irish, I am Latino, I am Black

Some based on our gender: I am a girl

Some based on the things we do: I am a pianist

Some based on our age: I am a child

Some based on our place in our families: I am a cousin, a brother, a daughter.

Some based on our feelings expression: I am a hugger!

Some based on how we see ourselves: I am a heroine. I am a UU!

SO MANY WAYS we can describe who we are that are all true about us! NO PERSON is just ONE – but we have many many identities that make us unique in the world.

Would it be possible even for a young person to have 100?! Yep!

Because as Unitarian Universalists, we celebrate every person's importance – their worth and their dignity, we celebrate how every person is unique in ALL the ways that make them unique and special. For our introductory fun exercise, each person will be given a page of star stickers. Each person will ask another: Who are UU? And when the person shares one of their identities (the things that make them who they are) the asker will give them a star wherever they like! See how many stars you can give away, celebrating every person's uniqueness! Try to answer the question differently each time!

Regather in circle. Today we are learning about the wonder of every person's identities as part of the wonder of life.

### **DEEPER LISTENING TO THE STORY:**

Review the story very briefly and which wisdom Source it comes from. Ask the children to listen more deeply: What was the most important part of the story for you? Where are you in the story- did you recognize yourself?? What part of it is about our monthly theme: INTERSECTIONALITY?

**LISTENING CIRCLE:** This is our listening chalice. We take two big breaths together to make a quiet circle.

We listen to each person say one thing from their listening inside, and do not interrupt or comment. It can be a celebration or a mourning from your week, or just how you are feeling inside right now. Pass chalice around again, inviting anyone who did not share at first to do so. Close the circle by giving voice to what was shared.

### **INFO:**

Explain to the children what a caricature is. *Caricature is a picture, description, or imitation of a person or thing in which certain striking characteristics are exaggerated in order to create a comic or grotesque effect.*

In other words, it is taking some aspect of a person's selfhood and making it like a cartoon or exaggerating it so it is gross or funny. Show an example you personally care about (if you have one).

In what way does exaggerating or making it different make fun of it? How do you think it would feel if someone did that to one of your identities—your age, your sex, your body, a body part, your gender, your nationality, your family or race?

It is very painful for any person to have part of what makes them unique be portrayed by others in a way that is gross or funny.

Look at Chief Wahoo logo and ask about why you think that UUs protested this image still used by the Cleveland Indians baseball team. (Native Americans have been protesting and taking other actions opposing the name and logo since the 1970s. There has been a demonstration on opening day each year for twenty years) If you are from an Indian Nation, how do you feel or think you would feel about it being used? Look at the picture of a real Chief. Can you see how this would be offensive?!

Look at the image from the Williams Gallery's "Take It Down" exhibit, show it in smaller form on poster. The same can be said of this panel from the Dentzel Carousel in Charlotte. Why do you think people actively protested it staying up? Do the children look real? What does it portray they feel? What does the picture say about the artist thought of these children? Can children be discriminated against? Why do you think our UU church wanted to bring it here?

Make these points:

- Racial images that depict features in gross or funny ways are public racism. Racism has a very long history in our country and city. They are related and still going on! How do you think?
- Images like these are hateful ways of portraying people in only ONE of their identities and not seeing them as whole human beings.
- As Unitarian Universalists, we value every person's identities. And we speak up when others are being put down.

References to read:

[http://www.espn.com/mlb/story/\\_/id/19136867/chief-wahoo-protesters-want-on-cleveland-indians-talks-mlb](http://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/19136867/chief-wahoo-protesters-want-on-cleveland-indians-talks-mlb)

At their 2001 general assembly in Cleveland, the [Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations](#) passed a resolution urging "the Planning Committee and the Board of Trustees to consult and cooperate" with the UCC's struggle against the use of the Chief Wahoo.<sup>[130]</sup> The secretary of the association, Wayne Arnason, described the church's call to witness against the use of mascots and logos like Chief Wahoo: "This witness is one your Board of Trustees endorsed as consistent and compelling in our effort to create an anti-racist Association ... This is about the owners of professional sports teams, the media that covers them, the fans that turn a blind eye—and also the political leaders who do not act."<sup>[130]</sup> After the opening ceremony of the 2001 Unitarian general assembly, more than three-quarters of the attendees participated in a vigil against the use of the logo,<sup>[130]</sup> with hundreds of Unitarian Universalists marching in solidarity with Native Americans through the rain from the convention center to Jacobs Field.<sup>[131][132]</sup> At a 2012 Unitarian Universalist workshop in Cleveland, participants suggested joining again with the yearly protests against Chief Wahoo.<sup>[133]</sup>

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2015/07/16/ontario-beach-carousel-image/30234441/>

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2016/01/14/activists-to-protest-carousel-image/78782652/>

### **GOING DEEPER THROUGH ACTIVITY:**

Explain to the children that today they are invited to be part of the following activity to explore the wisdom of the story for themselves more in the workshop:

Just like we wonder at the stars, we wonder at each person. In the center of your star, write your name, or draw a picture of yourself. On the light beams of your star, write the words for all of the aspects that make you unique and special. Color all the rays if you like!

Share them and be amazed at how valuable each person is, just as they are.



**RECAP:**

Back to centering circle for brief sharing. One minute- to review what you did in workshop.

Closing Check out: What are you grateful for from this workshop that you can take with you as you *Listen, Open, Serve Every day* this week?

*Example 3: Church Hop*

The Coming of Age youth go on a local UU church hop every year to explore different kinds of Unitarian Universalist churches and congregations within an hour's drive. One purpose is to offer youth the opportunity to notice differences in historical roots which continue to play some part in shaping a community in the present. This overnight places our congregation in the context of the Association, with its own unique flavor of Unitarian Universalism. From a theological standpoint, the trip offers the opportunity to experience worship in a few different settings, and provides historical markers of theological influences in buildings, art, historical displays, relational practices, etc.

Youth very much enjoy this experience and so, it has remained a standard in our COA programming since I included it years ago. Later in the year, when they write their own statements of belief and conscience, they can recognize the fluidity in their beliefs over time as well.

## Coming of Age Journey

### Session 4: Church Hop Retreat

**Introduction/ Itinerary Review**

Our time together will be a mix of learning about other UU communities and our denomination, and doing some things back at our home church to work on our own journey so far in our life and faith.

**Saturday**

4:30-5:30 Attend worship at First Unitarian

5:30-6 Eat and casual worship discussion

6:30- 7:15 Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua tour. Circle Discussion topic: What similarities do you notice? What differences? Offer gratitude.

7:45 First Universalist Church tour.

Circle discussion topic: What similarities do you notice? What differences? Offer gratitude.

8:45 Back to First Unitarian

9:00 Parents Arrive

9:15 Parent/Youth Circle: UU Superheroines and Heroes in Faith

10:30 Your Individual Spiritual Challenge

10:50 Break

12:00 Church History Hunt

12:30 Bedtime

## **Sunday**

8:40-9:20 Tour at Unitarian Church of Albion

10:00 Brockport Unitarian Universalist Fellowship worship service

12:00 Return to First Unitarian

## **Lenses**

### *Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, Multiculturalism (ARAOMC)*

Our Spiritual Survivor program for junior high youth involves going to four places of worship each year to learn about believing systems relative to Unitarian Universalist values. This year we also hosted a refugee guest, a Muslim, who helped to clearly dissolve myths about Islam according to the bias she has encountered in the United States. We also added a session for junior youth on classism and poverty, especially related to redlining in our city.

### *Technology*

This year we brought back another session on Seven Candles: Science for a Deeper Spirituality because youth really loved engaging with what they had learned online about it last year. With the use of online images, I have been readily enhancing lessons from Workshop Adventure through Coming of Age, relative to liberal theologies. These include everything from goddesses of earth-based traditions, to clips from GA expressing our emerging multicultural theology.

## **FAMILY MINISTRY**

### *Competency 12: Growing Our UU Village*

The family constitutes the primary educational source about relational life, and so plays an integral role in the process of developing relationships in communal life. Particularly important in our Unitarian Universalist tradition, due to our practice of covenant, the cultures, skills, priorities, and spiritual lives of families influence the collective web of our “UU village.” As families grow in their faith, faith communities grow. The reverse is also true: religious education serves to “reach into the home” and be a catalyst for everyday living of UU values.

Ministry with families involves attending to the developmental needs of individual members, and the whole family unit as distinct. To the extent that educational programming and other aspects of congregational experience can respond to and embrace these needs, it remains relevant and meaningful. Despite many cultural pressures to participate in educational, sports, work, and other activities on Sundays, engagement with religious community can still provide a unique role as a “second family,” grounded in common values and mission. “Binding back” as in the Latin *religare*, means providing multiple opportunities for families to reconnect with themselves, one another, community, and all of life.

### **Formation**

#### *Structured learning experiences*

- ~ Parenting Trans Children/ Beyond the Binary, First Universalist, Syracuse 2018 (7 hrs.)
- ~ Safe Congregations, Guild of Interim Religious Educators, 2018 (15 hr.)
- ~ Parenting As A Spiritual Practice (co-author) 2013- present (monthly, 1.25 hrs.)
- ~ Family Circle Training (author) OMD Summer Institute/ First Unitarian Church of Rochester (10 hrs.), 2017
- ~ Community Conferencing, Partners in Restorative Initiatives, 2017 (15 hr.)
- ~ UUMA Iroquois/LREDA Seaway Training- UU Faith Formation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Building Beyond Sunday Morning, 2015 (10 hrs.)
- ~ Peace Circles Facilitation: Partners in Restorative Initiatives, 2015 (18 hrs.)
- ~ LREDA Fall Con: Theme-Based Ministry, 2015 (Co-lead)
- ~ Creating Beloved Community for All Children, 2011 (1-day seminar)
- ~ UUMA Iroquois/LREDA Seaway Training: Family Systems Approach to Congregational Life, 2004 (10 hrs)
- ~ Renaissance Module: UU Identity (April, 2004)

### *Life experiences*

- ~ Offering pastoral care for families undergoing major stressors
- ~ Losing a parent and a sibling
- ~ Meeting with parents of children of color
- ~ Raising three teens as a single full-time parent
- ~ Growing up in a blended family of fourteen
- ~ Advanced clinical training as a therapist, including child abuse reporting
- ~ Co-leading monthly enrichments for UU and Catholic couples
- ~ Practicing the Family Unity Model with foster families as a clinical social worker
- ~ Working with families of various faith traditions during the grieving process
- ~ Working with youth from a diversity of faith and racial backgrounds in foster care
- ~ Facilitating family meetings
- ~ Creating and running UU Home Church

### **Application and Integration**

#### *Example 1: Parenting as a Spiritual Practice*

Given that parents (or caregivers) are seen as the primary “religious educators” of children and youth, this monthly group focuses on equipping them with tools for practicing Unitarian Universalist values in their parent/child relationships. Developed monthly with my staff and dharma teacher, Jan Cook, according to the current worship theme, the sessions offer mindfulness practices, education in Non-Violent Communication as related to our UU Principles and Sources, a time for doing an exercise with a partner, and sharing of celebrations and mournings.

This group has been going steadily for nearly 5 years on a drop-in basis. The sessions provide a direct tie into mindfulness practices used in RE, and support authentic relationships among parents. We have seen growth in many parents’ capacities to practice their values more clearly in how they address conflict, manage frustration and stress, and deepen their connection to their children.

### **Oct 24 FAITH**

#### **You’re So Worth Your Attention!**

Our spiritual practice during the month of FAITH is to pause using our mindfulness, and respond to the need for being seen. In this we affirm and promote inherent worth and dignity at a very basic and essential level.

## **Intro to Mindfulness Practice:**

### Mindfulness practice

\*Provides a means of “seeing” your whole self by recognizing the balance of mind, heart, and body as naturally as it is. (Show triangle)

\*Mindfulness techniques support the kind of “insight” that promotes our inherent worth and dignity as we see our own needs, feelings, thoughts, in the body and move with them in relational life with our children.

\*It also allows acute observation of what is here and now, not what we may hope or judge — breaking down the barriers to see others as they are, not how we want or hope for them to be.

\*Mindfulness gives us a seeing and having a felt sense of our connection to the wider web of life as UUs at any moment.

### **Mindfulness Practice 1:** FOFBOC (Feet On Floor, Bum On Chair)

Seeing yourself and feeling connection.

Take a few moments to scan the contact with the floor and seat, and open up to the support that is there for you. Emphasize this connection with support in your felt sense, letting gravity take your weight as you take a pause from current concerns and preoccupations. Let go into this connection with the earth. As thoughts arise telling you what you should be doing, let those thoughts drift away and come back with your attention in your body. Be the mirror to your breath, follow it in and out, watching it. Feel the sensation of your lungs and body moving, as much as you can as the air is moving in and out, expanding and contracting and rocking your body. Feel your spine moving upward on the inhale, and let go of any tension down into the earth on the exhale. Wherever your attention falls, acknowledge what is there and simply allow it to be there without judgment. Finally, rest and breathe for a few more moments as you open your senses to the space, sounds and colors around you.

## **Non-Violent Communication Intro:**

- 1) Our faith calls us to affirm and promote inherent worth and dignity. In NVC, this would be the practice of listening and responding to your needs, and those of others.
- 2) In NVC, being seen and seeing others is a Universal Need we all have as humans on the planet, among many others. Everyone needs to be “gotten,” to be understood and accepted. Developmentally one of the most primary needs for healthy sense of self,

compassion, and attachment is facial recognition and support in the emotional regulation with a care giver.

3) Culturally, many forces surround us as parents that draw our attention away from this very basic need for ourselves and our children:

- \* Not having time because of crazy schedules to really see what is going on in us and our children
- \* Habituation or narrowing by cultural images of being seen and seeing our children (I'm the good soccer mom doing everything and he is my star son)
- \* Isolation as parents by inner or outer judgements (the comparative mentality "I am not good enough", and not ever truly seeing the Jones').
- \* Our cultural suffering around race is one very visible way that systemically, the need of people to see and be seen is not being met which has historically resulted in systemic violence and oppression.

### **NVC Practice Exercise:**

Take a few deep breaths and...

Remember a time when you felt seen or did not this week. OR

Remember a time when you were able to really "see" your child or missed the chance to recently.

Share 2 minutes with a partner about this simple yet powerful recognition of the basic need to be seen. This seeing is part of the practice! Allow mourning and celebration. Notice, a lack of happiness and additional self-punishment, judgment, anger, etc., when the need to see and be seen is not met. Notice the satisfaction when it is.

**Gratitudes-** share a gift you received and what you might do this month, considering this teaching.

### *Example 2: Parent Engagement in Church Visioning*

Given that parents rarely attend congregational meetings of the church, I feared a poor parent turnout at our upcoming visioning sessions hosted by the Board of Trustees. I collaborated with board members to ensure there were adequate opportunities for participation and have used various strategies to articulate reasons why parents' ideas matter. The visioning sessions will determine the direction the church will take as we embark on welcoming new ministers and embrace a new church vision moving forward.

So far, this special message has had high open rates and click through indications. In the initial two weeks, several parents have signed up! If I have an opening in my Sunday schedule, I would especially like to invite people directly at pick up time.

## Parents' Voices in Shaping the Future of First U!



Dear Parents~

Now is the time for everyone to have a voice in the priorities our church for Our Road Ahead! If you haven't heard what's going on, check it out [here](#). Your input as a parent is especially important because of:

~ FAMILY

The ends of the Board will inform the aims of RE and shape the church you want for you and your children.

~ DIVERSITY

Your experiences and values are essential in creating a variety of perspectives!

~ RELEVANCY

The church's governance structure depends on your participation to adapt to current times and needs!

**I have collaborated with the Board to help make their visioning sessions accessible to you. To this end, every parent is asked to sign up for a time that will fit:**

Click [Regular sessions at church](#) for the list of all sessions open to the entire congregation. There is one with childcare for as many who need it on Saturday, March 3<sup>rd</sup> from 1-3:30.

Click [Session during RE](#) to sign up for February 25 from 9:30-11am

Click [Zoom from home](#) to sign up for an online session either Tuesday, Feb 27th or Friday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, from 7-9:30pm

Whether you are new to church, no matter how deeply you have been involved, no matter the age of your children, **your Board wants you on board!!!**

Excited and grateful to be beside you and yours~

*Sheila*

"It is a key tenet of Unitarian Universalism that our churches are not defined by a creed, nor a church hierarchy, nor by a minister - but by congregants in covenant with each other. We decide who we are as a faith community."



**firstunitarian**  
church of rochester

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**Sheila Schuh**

*Director of Religious Education*

[SheilaS@rochesterunitarian.org](mailto:SheilaS@rochesterunitarian.org)

585-743-0425

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*Example 3: Family Survey*

This survey was done because of a perception that families were feeling higher levels of stress than normal, due to the recent election and cultural climate. Having this feedback allowed me to prioritize offerings, according to what parents expressed. In fact, we were able to offer four of these items listed before the end of the church year. Parents truly appreciated the extra effort and support. I learned to follow my instinct and simply listen when I have the feeling that I don't know what more we could be doing.

Jan 19 2017

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Hi Parents! So much is going on in the culture and for our families! I wanted to check in about your needs. What program or group would be most supportive?

Thanks for your input--

Peace~

Sheila



Age-Specific Parent Support Groups for Current Issues and Events (ie, Sexting )

Meditation Group for Parents

Parent Political Activism Group

Family Circle Training (Structures to build family communication and connection)

Family Studio (Workshops to re-enact challenging family situations and explore UU alternatives)

Family Forum Exploring Social Issues (ie., How racial tensions are influencing UU family life)

Parenting as Spiritual Practice (More often than once per month)

Is there a program, group, or event you would really benefit from that you didn't see listed above?

So I can be in touch with you if needed, please type your name.

#### *Example 4: UU Families in Action*

This section of every RE newsletter posts family-friendly offerings for participating in social justice efforts of the church and beyond. With a quick, easy snapshot of how to get involved, who to contact, and age requirements, this section provides parents with all the info they need to take the next step. Social justice task forces have been grateful to have this avenue for engagement and connection to their ministry efforts.

## **UU Families in Action**

### **SHOW YOUR SOLIDARITY!**

Pittsforward has just learned that 1040AM radio personality Shannon Joy has announced on her show that she plans on attending and "disrupting" the showing of "I'm Not A Racist, Am I?" at Pittsford Sutherland HS tomorrow, (Jan 19th) at 6:30pm. Show up and support this important education.

**BackPacking in 2017!**

Here are the next opportunities to volunteer at Foodlink:

- Tues, Feb. 7, 6-8 p.m.
- Sat., March 11, 9-noon
- Tues., April 11, 6-8 p.m.

To sign up, send me your full name(s) and the date(s) you can commit to! Thanks!  
chris.farnum@gmail.com

**RAIHN needs you!**

Please sign up if you can help during the next rotation January 29th- February 5th!

1. **Click this link** to go to our invitation page: <http://signup.com/go/PHMgia>
2. **Enter your email address.** (You do not need to register an account on SignUp.com)
3. **Sign up!** Choose your spots - SignUp will send you automated confirmation and reminders. Easy!

**RALLY!**

The People's Solidarity Rally  
11am at Washington Square Park  
Saturday, January 21st

**7th Principle in Action: Environmental Justice Subgroup**

Younger children had asked at their annual meeting in May for more opportunities to work on environmental issues. Sheila is looking to support a multi-age group who work in collaboration with our Climate Change Task Force. Please email Sheila if your child or family may be interested in learning more or being a part. Thanks! [SheilaS@rochesterunitarian.org](mailto:SheilaS@rochesterunitarian.org)

**Lenses***Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, Multiculturalism (ARAOMC)*

One offering we ran, based on the survey results, was a session for parents who had concerns about their children's mental health. During the session, one of our parents of color spoke to the worry that his child would have difficulties due to unchecked racism at both societal and institutional levels. When another white-identified person offered an unhelpful solution, I responded with deeper listening and a commitment to continue to address the needs of families of color in religious education. Recently, I have advocated at two meetings, one with our Black Lives Matter social justice task force and one with the board, to lift up the needs of our families of color and those with multi-racial identities, for a comprehensive vision and planning.

## *Technology*

One of the easiest ways to support families at home is to offer suggestions for ongoing conversation and action based on church experiences and learning. “After Church Chat” is a section in our online RE newsletters that invites parents to engage their children by doing something together or having dialogues. Also, busy families sometimes don’t read their RE newsletter, so when a scheduling change or special event is announced and the electronic notice does not get opened, our RE Administrator can give a quick call and leave a message.

## **UU FAMILY CIRCLE TRAINING** **Background, Prelude, and Reflections** **By Sheila Schuh** **Candidate for Credentialed Religious Educator, Master Level**

### Background Information

As Unitarian Universalists, we draw from many sources of wisdom, including the “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.” One of the most profound and basic teachings from indigenous cultures of North America and around the world, is the value of community more than individuality. While every person has worth, inherent gifts, and capacities to contribute, the interdependence of relational life is primary in the wholeness of the community. The practice of gathering in circles and using the circle as a relationship structure has been used for many hundreds of years in rituals and meetings, and is less of a method than an expression that embodies the sacred circle of life itself or “interdependent web.” Circle processes such as listening to stories, sharing power and time, honoring diverse perspectives, etc. have been and continue to be a way of maintaining community trust and hence, the interdependent web of all life.

Family circles are one of many kinds of “restorative practices.” Circles of different kinds form a continuum of practices that a community might use in an effort to “restore” or keep the relational connections strong and healthy in a system. These practices may be short or long, simple or complex, and done with few or many, depending on the needs present. Structures for different restorative practices vary and have different levels of circle process and characteristics. When using the term, “restorative justice,” for example, these kinds of practices are used when there has been an offense or action of harm done, and a “restorative circle” or “community conference” is called to promote healing and responsibility.

For more reading on circle process:

<http://www.livingjusticepress.org>

<http://www.peacecircles.com>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8\\_94O4ExSA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8_94O4ExSA)

### Project Prelude

My interest in family circles probably began in the background of my consciousness as the youngest in a blended family of fourteen! And, it likely grew over the course of my work as a foster care social worker with court-appointed cases and also working as an art therapist with families in bereavement. What is critical in the restoration of broken bonds or nurturing ongoing bonds as they change is the need for the suspension of assumptions about shared experience, a means for allowing deep needs and feelings to be presented without judgment, for collaboration in the process of forgiveness and joy, and liberation that comes from receiving from and contributing to something larger. In religious education, we are essentially offering people a means of “binding back,” restoring authentic connection with self, others, and all of life. In my perspective, as a covenantal faith tradition, we need defined practices that model and express Unitarian Universalist Principles in our everyday relationships. Family relationships are primary in the education and spiritual development of our young people, and so it makes sense to equip families with tools for such practices.

### Project Reflections

People experienced these workshops as a breath of fresh air. Modern parents deal with a multitude of stressors and so beyond taking time to simply feel connection with their families, they also expressed gratitude for having an ongoing structure they can use to support their parenting values in modern life. I have consistently been moved by the contribution of children in these sessions- from suggestions for how their families could use the tool (processing the death of a beloved grandparent or figuring out how best to address the needs of twins for their birthdays), to questions about limits of individual rights such as, “What if my brother says something in the circle I don’t want to do?!”

Doing these circles with families has nurtured my advocacy for more collaborative and restorative processes at the congregational level. I have employed my circle training to address covenant breaches and rule breaks with youth, in small rituals to celebrate staff wins, to revise program models, in nurturing monthly RE team connections, feedback sessions with children, contributing to personnel policy and procedures, and processing parent concerns. Most recently, using a listening circle with parents of children of color has inspired a multiplicity of actions taken to address institutional racism: a people of color group for children and youth, a Soul Matters adult group for people of color, advocacy with the Board of Trustees for a comprehensive vision for the Beloved Community, etc.

Family circle as a tool can equip people with skills and alternative ways of being together that they can employ to alter the wider culture of the congregational system. No coincidence, non-indigenous communities began using circle process as an alternative to the punitive methods of criminal justice system of the dominant culture. Similarly, my hope is that

it can be one way of intentionally rejecting dominant cultural norms our families are steeped in, including those of White Supremacy and institutional racism, which do not reflect or embody our values as a people of faith.

**UU FAMILY CIRCLE TRAINING**  
**By Sheila Schuh,**  
**Director of Religious Education**  
**First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- \*Seating so each family can sit in a circle together
- \*Newsprint and easel, or dry erase board
- \*Chalice and matches at center of group (other seasonal items optional)
- \*Singing the Living Tradition hymnal
- \*Small chalices or candles for each family
- \*Various talking pieces
- \*Circle Format Opportunities list posted on newsprint with room for group brainstorm
- \*Photo of an indigenous circle group from your area and one from another continent
- \*Twine
- \*Seven Core Assumptions of Circle Process, either on newsprint or visual display
- \*Elements of Circle Process
- \*Copies of Circle Guidelines, one per family
- \*Copies of UU Family Circle Planning Guide and pencils, one per family

**CENTERING:**

Chalice Lighting- Invite a child or youth as age appropriate

Reading #602 Singing the Living Tradition- If There is To Be Peace

We are here to share a tool for you to use as families, to strengthen your connections and communication at home: Family Circle. It's a way to help UU families practice our values where it counts most – at home, with the people you spend so much time and closeness with! Wouldn't we all love to make family life more enjoyable for ourselves and those we love, if we could? Here is one fun and easy way to!

## **INTRODUCTIONS:**

### Family Sound/ Movement Introduction

Invite each family unit, no matter how small, to come up with a sound/ movement to show others what one of their family strengths is. Share with the group, including your names. Facilitators, also introduce themselves, representing their family similarly!

## **CIRCLE FORMAT RATIONALE:**

Invite one family to volunteer to help us answer the questions: Why does the way we gather together as a family matter? Why does being in the shape of a circle make a difference?

Have the family simply sit together in a circle so that they are on the same seated level. Invite everyone in the room to take some deep breaths with them, simply noticing 1) smells or sounds, 2) sights, 3) touch or sense/feel of body in space

Ask the volunteer family: What do you notice about your connection with your family members, sitting in circle? Record their answers on newsprint. After they have spoken, ask for anyone on the outside of the circle to give voice to anything they notice. Affirm each witness with a general circle characteristic. If a child says, "I notice that my mom is looking at me more." You could offer, "So we make more eye contact in a circle." Then based on their list, and filling in any that did not get named, go through each characteristic that the format gives and opportunity for, noting everyday family life counter norms listed below:

### **Circle Format Opportunities:**

Shared Leadership- minimizes structural distinctions between teacher/learner, equal capacity to participate. (Not lecture style. Parent telling everybody what to do!)

Visual Contact- easier to listen deeply with eye and body in sight. (Not texting!)

Focus- structure focuses attention on the participants, and task at hand, reducing outside distraction. (Not other things beyond circle- video games, lists, or Netflix!)

Connection- circle links all to one another in unity, encouraging shared effort or common purpose. (Wholeness and intention of joining as one-- not all our own agendas!)

Respect/Accountability- because everyone is seen and heard, circle discourages side conversations or demeaning non-verbal behaviors. (No negative spewing!)

Input From All/ Inclusion- going around allows each person to be heard. (No domination by a few extroverted voices!)

### **HISTORY:**

Roots of circle are in indigenous communities as a means for providing community decision-making, responsibility, and celebration. Show an image of an indigenous group from your area and one from another continent.

Modern cultural family needs include many stressors. Invite a family to volunteer to help us answer the question: What forces in our current world act on our family life, creating potential disconnection and stress?! Ask them to stand in a circle as they are able, and have each member hold a part of a piece of twine that is tied in a circle.

Invite others in the room to come forward and represent a force in modern times that causes tension in their family connection by pulling on a spot in the twine!

Give witness to the things that are named aloud, repeating them for younger children as needed. Mention others that you know in your area and demographic: modern day culture encourages separation, demonization of those who disagree, competition, hierarchy, reliance on experts to solve problems, other things as central/not family, instant answers, highly scheduled work and school lives, a throwaway society of consumerism, tech use, etc.

Soon there is a lot of stress on that connection!! Thank the family and all for their input. Circles provide a way to help keep the connections and rebuild them when there is separation due to all these stressors.

**Unitarian Universalist Application-** As Unitarian Universalist families, we are called to draw from Sources of Wisdom to help us live out our UU Principles in ways that our larger society may not affirm or promote. Within the covenant of circle guidelines, we learn to practice skills of living in community. Circle process is a way for us to embrace:

- A. UU Sources: Earth based traditions call us to be connected in the wider interdependent web of life; Humanistic teachings encourage us to use the latest science about relationships (which shows that even eating together helps families solve problems better)! Direct experience of mystery and wonder can teach us more about our family truths when we can wonder together and tell our stories together.
- B. UU Principles: We can honor one another's inherent worth; Engage in democratic process for peace-making; Affirm our search *together* for truth and meaning; Allow acceptance and growth; Help each other develop empathy and compassion; Act with justice.

Show the Seven Core Assumptions of Circle process and note the similarities to the above.

- C. Our church/ congregation's mission. If yours is a mission-based UU community, name here the ways that circle can help families embrace that mission as a family at home. For example, to "Build spiritual connection by listening to our deepest selves, opening to life's gifts, and serving needs greater than our own."

### **HOW TO DO CIRCLE PROCESS:**

Using the posted Elements of Circle Process, go through each one listed below, and describe how it fits into using a circle. Share a quick example of each.

Opening and Closing- Mark time as space apart. Help shift gears from pace and tone of ordinary life. Help to remind of core values, and honor presence of all. Closings help affirm family efforts. Convey hope and interconnection. Examples: reading, sharing a song, offering gratitude, a hand hold, playing a game or cooperative game, lighting a candle, doing some yoga, chalice lighting!

Talking piece- The object passed from one to another offers opportunity to talk while others can listen without thinking of response. No obligation. Assures no interruption, slows the pace of conversation, and allows expression of difficult feelings without process spinning out of control. An equalizer. Keeper speaks last usually. Examples: show on table.

Time for sharing- Storytelling about one's experience when holding, allows others to listen without a lot of agreement or disagreement going on mentally. Allows info to be exchanged more thoroughly because listening for deeper understanding. Sharing from heart/ mind, feelings, needs in "I" language, experiences, we open the opportunity for others to connect to us. Also allows us to be self-reflective in articulating how we understand what happened in us. Honor worth and power. No shame, blame, fixing, saving, or advice-giving. Examples: Ask someone to volunteer- can you share about why it is important to you to have your friends over. What chore would you choose to do if you had a choice? How would you like the family to celebrate your birthday?

Circle keeper- Not responsible for finding solutions or controlling the group. Opens the group by modeling first sharing and monitors the quality of the space as the group goes on. Not an enforcer but a monitor, sharing responsibility and contributing equally. Rarely speaks outside of regular sharing turn. Notices and sets the tone to keep circle in line with family values. Names what has been heard in the circle at the end of a round.



Consensus- Decision making in circles requires attitude of exploration vs. conquering. Not all circles are about decision-making but when they are, it means all parties can live with the group's decision, though they may not agree. (Ex., Your own family example here)

Agreed upon guidelines- Before doing a circle, participants come up with guidelines that are ways that they commit to behave with each other in circle. These are formulated by asking everyone about what they need for themselves from others. They are supported by consensus not "enforced" by any one person. Respect includes the freedom to pass. Share example of simple Circle Guidelines or a guidelines set used in other circles in your congregation such as sharing circles or Soul Matters.

Optional: Name some elements families may add: centerpiece, food, etc

### **A BRIEF PRACTICE:**

Invite families to try a simple circle, using this format: Opening chalice lighting. Simple guidelines of listening when holding talking piece. Choose a circle keeper to go first who asks: What is something you felt grateful for today? Close the circle by naming what was shared. Extinguish chalice.

If families finish sooner than later, invite them to try another, giving this suggestion: What is one way you noticed a family member contributing to others in the family, lately?

### **KINDS OF CIRCLES:**

Explain that a gratitude circle is just ONE KIND of circle. You can use a circle for so many things!! Or for the same thing every week, day, or month!! Ask the group, "What are some things you think your family could use a family circle for?" Record responses and add some that are not mentioned.

- Celebrate something (birthday appreciations)
- Have better understanding about an event or topic or decision
- Find a solution to a conflict or crisis
- Support someone in a rough patch
- Consensus decision making about family matters
- Rituals (saying goodbye, planning a week, family fun)
- After UU community time- share learnings on monthly theme
- Not just talking! Share a need, give gifts, sing, etc. (If you have time, invite families to do a circle in which every person gets to request something from the circle right now that is doable in the moment)

## **QUESTIONS**

Ask if there are any questions at this time, explaining that you will have some time to start discussing as a family, how you want to use this in your home.

## **UU FAMILY PREPARATION FOR CIRCLES**

Hand out the UU Family Circle Planning Guide. Go through each section and talk through what kinds of decisions families can make. Allow them some initial time in talking together...

Remembering to:

Decide regularity/ frequency

Agree time and length limits

Decide focus/ content

Write down any planned decisions (Show example if you have tried this)

Balance content – Build community 80% helps more effective, during the 20% challenges

Make it uniquely your own

## **CLOSING NEXT STEPS AND CELEBRATIONS/ MOURNINGS**

Stand in body or spirit together and join hands. Give thanks for all that was shared. Offer a final group circle of what each person appreciated about this time together, or something that is still needed for their family that we can support. Ask if the group would like to have a session to check back in about how their circles are going. End with your congregation's or RE's closing words/ song.

# CIRCLE GUIDELINES



Speak from the heart:  
your truth, your experiences,  
your perspectives

Listen from the heart:  
let go of stories that make it hard  
to hear each other

Trust that you will know what to say:  
no need to rehearse

Say just enough:  
without feeling rushed, be concise and  
considerate of the time of others

# Seven Core Assumptions

## *What We Believe to Be True*

1

The **true self**  
in everyone is  
**good, wise, and**  
**powerful.**

6

**Human beings**  
are  
**holistic.**

2

The **world is**  
**profoundly**  
**interconnected.**

7

We need **practices**  
to build **habits**  
**of living** from the  
**core self.**

5

**Everything we need**  
to make positive change  
**is already here.**

3

All **human beings**  
have a **deep desire**  
to be in a  
**good relationship.**

4

All **human beings** have **gifts,**  
and **everyone is needed**  
for what they bring.

The assumptions are derived from and build on Indigenous teachings and other wisdom traditions. Excerpted from *Heart of Hope and Circle Forward*, by Carolyn Boyes-Watson and Kay Pranis. © Living Justice Press. Permissions: [ljpress@aol.com](mailto:ljpress@aol.com) Photo by Loretta Drathis: Lake Superior, Minnesota. For educational and training purposes only.



# Family Circle Planning

## Elements of the Family Circle

- 🕯 Opening and Closing
- 🕯 Talking piece
- 🕯 Time for Sharing
- 🕯 Circle Keeper
- 🕯 Consensus
- 🕯 Agreed upon Guidelines
- 🕯 Optional: Centerpiece, food, etc



## The Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
5. The right of conscience and the use of democratic process
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part



Participants and Level of choice:



Circle Keeper(s) decided by:



Time and Place:



Purpose / Content of Our Family  
Circle(s):



Opening:



Closing:



Our Family Guidelines:



Our Talking Piece:



Centerpiece? Food? Etc.