

First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor Participants' Guide to Chalice Circles



Purpose

The Chalice Circle program is part of the congregation's Small Group Ministry. It provides a structure within which participants minister to each other. Chalice Circles encourage people in their spiritual growth and help them develop relationships of substance and depth. The primary subject of Chalice Circles is the members' lives.

Description

Chalice Circles have 8-12 members and are led by two trained lay leaders. Groups meet twice a month from the second half of October through the first half of May – fourteen sessions in all – in the church (or other set place). Each session lasts two hours. (One-time Chalice Circles are also offered for those who wish to try out the program or cannot attend the 14-session October-to-May program. These meet once at a set time and place announced in the weekly UUAA Bulletin.)

Chalice Circles enrich our community with conversation and attentiveness that can be difficult to find in the busy life of a congregation. Group members listen to each other, but don't attempt to solve each others' problems. They are not therapy or support groups. The members and facilitators support each other. When a member is in need, the facilitators and other group members may provide support outside the meeting. They may suggest that the individual consult with the Pastoral Care Team or the supporting minister, as needed. An Advance Reflection is provided prior to each meeting. Some topics are spiritual in nature (joy, trust, faith, and prayer are examples); others reflect universally human themes (for example, love, loss, forgiveness, and humor). Members respond to the topic questions by sharing personal experiences. The focus is on deep listening, reflection, and an interchange among group members.

Chalice Circle Benefits

1. Find and build a safe and trusting community.
2. Experience mutual commitment to shared goals.
3. Encounter something sacred in yourself and others.
4. Enliven us spiritually, socially and intellectually.
5. Enhance deep listening skills.
6. Know yourself better by seeing your life in the context of others' experiences.
7. Deepen our understanding of Unitarian Universalist principles and values.
8. Draw us into shared ministry.
9. Give back to the community by doing a service project.

Eligibility and Registration

Chalice Circles are open to members and visitors of the UUAA community who want to participate. You can join a group by completing a registration form on the church's website or registering in the Social Hall following Sunday services during September. At the time of registration, you will select the group that is most convenient for your personal schedule.

Format of a Chalice Circle Meeting

Each session has an Order of Service which includes the following:

1. Chalice lighting.
2. Clearing – a time to share any concerns or unfinished business from the previous meeting.
3. Readings.
4. Check in – each member shares something of their life since the last meeting and how they are currently feeling.
5. Sharing – each person shares their feelings and reflections on a series of questions related to the session topic. It is a time for everyone to be heard without interruption.
6. Break – refreshments are an option, if the group chooses.
7. Discussion – the members can share additional thoughts on the topic or respond to something another member said.
8. Check out – respond to “As I leave I am feeling...”
9. Closing reading; extinguish the chalice.

Selection and Development of Sessions

Topics are selected from a list of suggestions collected from facilitators and participants by the Writing Team. The team is comprised of volunteers. It creates and makes available the Advance Reflection and Order of Service for each meeting.

Expectations of Participants

1. Commit to coming to each meeting.
2. Be on time.
3. Listen deeply while letting each person be respectfully heard.
4. Share your own experiences via “I” statements, without giving advice to others.
5. Grow by trying to live our values and reminding each other of these shared values and having the opportunity for spiritual growth and emotional maturation.
6. Honor the basic format which includes a ritual such as lighting the chalice, and view the Chalice Circle as an extension of Sunday worship. There may be moments of silence and meditation or prayer.
7. Treat what people share in the circle with respect outside the circle. Honor requests for confidentiality as much as possible while respecting also your own right not to be overly burdened or isolated by another’s issues shared in confidence. Also honor the function of the group as a supportive forum for personal sharing that is not a support or therapy group.
8. Bring significant pastoral care needs to the Pastoral Care Coordinator. Chalice Circle facilitators can help individual participants discern if a situation warrants referral to a Pastoral Care provider.
9. Select and complete a two to four hour service project of the group’s choosing for the First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor.