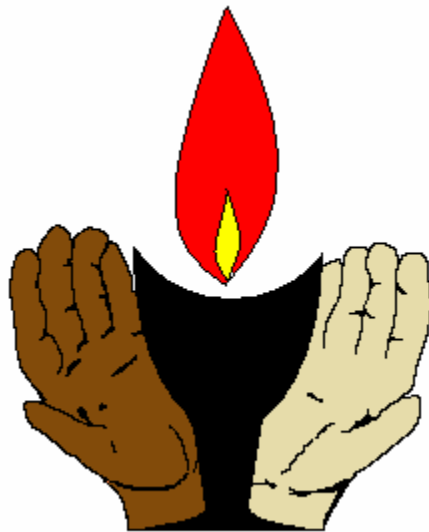


**Unitarian Universalist Association
Young Adult and Campus Ministry
Covenant Group Series
Volume 2**



Finding Your Path

by Michael Tino

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About the Young Adult and Campus Ministry Covenant Group Series

Welcome to Volume 2 of the Young Adult and Campus Ministry Covenant Group series. We hope that these resources will be valuable to your group, and can provide you with program ideas and community building exercises to form deep relations among the members of your group.

The series will continue with a number of covenant group curricula. Each curriculum will present a series of group sessions that fit with the covenant group format in the Young Adult and Campus Ministry Covenant Group Manual. We hope that these curricula will center on topics of interest to young adults—life decisions, identity issues, social justice, anti-oppression, and relationships, to name a few. There is no intended order to these curricula—we hope that your group will review the available choices and decide which ones interest you the most.

Please let us know if there are specific covenant group curricula you'd like to see developed or if there are sessions or series that you've developed that you'd like to share. This series is intended to be ongoing. While print copies of the manual and curricula will always be available from the Office of Young Adult and Campus Ministry for a small fee, we intend to make these resources available for free on our web site; we trust that you will print and copy them for your group's use only and that you will not sell them. Check the site from time to time for new curricula.

Lastly, it's important to note that the development of this manual and the entire Young Adult and Campus Ministry covenant group series has been made possible by the Campaign for Unitarian Universalism and the Mind the Gap: Youth and Young Adult Ministry Sunday campaign.

Michael Tino
Director of Young Adult and Campus Ministry
Unitarian Universalist Association
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About This Curriculum

Young adult life is filled with decisions and transitions. An incredible number of the most important decisions people in our society make in their lives are made between the ages of 18 and 35. Choices about family, career, relationships, community and calling are all at the forefront of our lives as young adults.

One of the things that weigh heavily on the minds of many young people is the pressure to choose a career and train for it. Without a real sense of themselves, their passions, their values and their needs, young adults often choose careers for which they are ill-suited, and in which they become increasingly miserable.

I know—I've been there. At 18, I was convinced I wanted to be a scientist. Molecular and cell biology fascinated me, so it became my undergraduate major and my presumed career. Not until graduate school did I realize my misfit with a career in research science.

I had to ask myself what was next. I had to find a career that fit who I was and where I needed to go. In doing this, I sought a lot of help. I relied on trusted advisors, I sought new experiences, I leaned on my community of faith. It was a few years after that when I realized my call to the ministry. It was, to be sure, there all along—I was just not ready to hear it.

What would have prepared me to receive that call earlier? A chance to get to know myself. A chance to sit down and really understand what motivates me. A chance to connect my passions and my values with my career aspirations.

Those are precisely the chances I hope to give young adults through this covenant group curriculum. Through these sessions, your group will explore themselves in deep and meaningful ways. By the end, we hope that the young adults who have completed this exploration will have a better sense of how they are called to live their lives in the world and that they've found a path for further exploration.

I don't believe that leading this curriculum calls for any special preparation beyond the general training for covenant group leaders (see the Young Adult and Campus Ministry Covenant Group Manual in this series for more information on that). You need to be able to listen. You need to be able to deal with people dealing with deep and personal issues. You need to be able to move a group forward in discussion, and to know when it's OK to sit in silence for a while. I hope you enjoy these sessions, and I look forward to hearing how they turn out in your group.

Opening Session: What Do You Want?

For the Facilitator

In this opening session, it is especially important that you create community and trust. Make a proper setting for this to happen—perhaps share a meal while checking in, or make sure you have a really comfortable and private space to meet in. Before this session, the group should have established its covenant (see the Young Adult and Campus Ministry Covenant Group Manual for more instructions on that), so people will likely already be somewhat familiar with one another.

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting

Come into the circle of love and justice.
Come into the community of mercy, holiness and health.
Come and you shall know peace and joy.

-Adapted from Israel Zangwill (Reading #418 in *Singing The Living Tradition*)

Focus Reading

Wild Night Wind

Michael Tino

I want...

...a hug each morning to greet the brand new day, and one each night to bid it farewell.
...to know love as vast as the sky and as pure as the first winter snow.
...a sandy beach each summer to keep me cool and a blazing fire each winter to warm me.
...to soar through the air like a bird, if only to remind myself of the magic and wonder of being earthbound.
...a wild night wind to rustle the trees as I drift to sleep, and to call my dreams by name.

I want...

...to feel peace deep down in the core of my being.
...a babbling brook to sit by and notice the passage of time and seasons and the unfolding of life before me.
...a room to call my own in which I can be free to create, to develop, to learn, or simply to sit in a warm ray of sunshine streaming in through the window, amidst the dancing dust faeries and shadows.

I want...

...to seek justice, simple and true, and to pass it like water for all to drink from.

...to be wholly a part of creation, in concert with beings and mountains and trees, treating all which surrounds me as part of myself.

...a compass, true and steady, to point me the way I've been longing to go and to help me remember the way that I've been.

I want...

...a steaming pot of Earl Grey tea to share with a friend and inspire conversation (or simply silence, in gentle recognition that nothing needs to be said).

...to stand tall and firm, proud of my accomplishments but, at the same time, humble in my minuteness in the glory of all being.

...to know God as the loving spirit in each of my breaths, transcending the boundaries of all space and time and transforming my breathing into being.

And what do you want in the deepest center of your very being?

What quickens your heart and shortens your breath at the mere thought of it entering your life?

What sounds an echo in the back of your soul and enters the symphony within you like a high, insistent flute, calling your name over and over?

Is it peace? Is it love? Is it harmony with all beings?

Or is it a mission, a calling, a purpose?

Is it a reason that you want?

Or a question?

Or an answer?

Is it fields of purple heather swaying softly in the breeze

or libraries of knowledge to satisfy your growing curiosity?

Is it woolly socks in winter to keep your toes warm as you snuggle on the couch watching the snow fall

or maple trees in autumn, blazing colors bright and true like wild fire on the mountains towards the far horizon?

Is it a fountain in the summer, spraying, misting, sprinkling you with water and forming puddles to wiggle your toes through

or a seedling in the springtime, pushing up through loamy soil and creating life from a dormant shell?

What is it you really want?

An afternoon, a kitten, or a bicycle?

Or maybe justice like the waters
and pride

and love
and wonder?
A cup of tea, a ray of sun?
A peaceful, quiet moment?

Perhaps a hug to start each day, and one to fall asleep by,
or a wild night wind that moves the trees
and sparks your dreams
and lets you know possibilities without end.

Questions For Reflection

Who are you? Introduce yourself to the group.

What do you want?

What are your dreams?

How have they changed the way you live your life?

What do you hope to get out of this curriculum?

Closing Words

Discipline is remembering what you want.

-Attributed to David Campbell

Preparing for the Next Session

The next session is about our gifts and talents. Ask people to bring an object that represents they are particularly proud of—something they made, a picture of an event they participated in, a prize they won, a symbol of personal triumph over adversity or oppression, etc.—and use these objects as an altar (you might want to bring a decorative cloth for the altar), or as part of check-in.

Session 2: Letting Your Light Shine

For the Facilitator

This session is about our talents and how we use them. If you asked participants to bring objects that represented things they were proud of, have participants arrange the objects around the chalice (perhaps on a pretty altar cloth) as a focal point to the room. You may choose to have participants share something about their object as part of their check-in.

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp-stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works....

-Matthew 5:14-16

Focus Reading

A Figment of Her Imagination

Vanessa Rush Southern

My mother's family, immigrants from Holland, fell in love with Ella Fitzgerald. My mother and aunts knew the entire "Ella Sings Gershwin" collection by heart. At family gatherings, we little nieces and nephews were serenaded with "A Tisket, A Tasket" and before long we were able to join in too.

So perhaps it is no surprise that if I had a choice and could be anything in the world, I would not be a minister, but a jazz singer. I find some solace in the fact that there are some similarities between the two professions. Both ministers and jazz singers sing of life's ups and downs. Both reach out across the dark spaces to try to connect with others and say, "you are not alone," and, "I have been there too." Both wear a lot of black.

Clearly there are differences between the professions. For one, the work hours are totally reversed. For another, there is that nagging issue of talent.

I was reminded of the talent issue just the other day. Still singing along with the stereo, I switched off the car and got out. Without Ella singing along and the big band sound in the background to drown me out, all that could be heard in the silence and echo of the parking garage was me—a waffling voice and all those missed notes. It was then that I

thought, as I have a thousand times before, of how much I yearn to have a voice like Ella's.

At that moment, I had a crazy thought that might pass as a revelation. What if some crazy flip-flop were the case? I thought to myself. What if I were to find out that years ago a beautiful jazz singer had dreamed of being me? What if, more than anything else, this singer wanted to possess the gifts and talents I possess? Indeed, what if she had *dreamed me up* and her highest aspirations and life-long yearnings were supposed to come to fruition through me? How ungrateful I would be to stand here wasting my time dreaming of being her!

What would happen if each of us were to find out that we were the creation of someone else's dreams? I wonder: Would that change the way we live our lives? Would we spend less time thinking about what we don't have or aren't? Would we spend more time cherishing who we are? Would we approach life a bit like a treasure hunt, and spend our time looking for the gifts the dreamer had hidden in us? Perhaps we would stay awake at night, not worrying by wondering—wondering what great works or wonders this dreamer had made us capable of making real?

So, I don't feel so bad these days about one dream brutally brought to a close in an empty parking lot. Instead, I have decided to spend some time wondering what notes Ella had in mind when she dreamed me up. I have no doubt that they are s'wonderful. Now I just need to find them.

Questions For Reflection

What are you particularly good at?

What are you proud of having accomplished?

What talents do you have?

How do you let your light shine in the world?

Closing Words

Go out into the highways and by-ways.
Give the people something of your new vision.

You may possess a small light,
but uncover it, let it shine,
use it in order to bring more light and understanding
to the hearts and minds of men and women.

Give them not hell, but hope and courage,
preach the kindness and
everlasting love of God.

-John Murray (Reading #704 in *Singing The Living Tradition*)

Preparing for the Next Session

There is no necessary preparation for the next session, but it might be helpful to check in with the group participants before it. As the sessions move on, the development of a trusting community will become more important, so it's important that people attend these early sessions, as they are easier than the following ones.

Session 3: Sparks and Flames

For the Facilitator

This session focuses on what interests us—what sparks something within us, makes us energized, lights a gleam in our eye. This can be a fun session; feel free to get creative with it.

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting

At times, our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.

-Albert Schweitzer (Reading #447 in *Singing The Living Tradition*)

Focus Reading

How Wonderful

Howard Thurman

How wonderful it is to be able to feel things deeply!

The sheer delight of fresh air when you have been indoors all day;
The never ending wonder of sunrise and sunset;
The sound of wind through the trees and the utter wetness of the rain;

The excitement of finding something that was lost and is found:

My fountain pen,
A beautiful word forgotten,
The return of an old book,
The reconciliation after estrangement,
The first step after months of illness.

How moving is the sheer wonder of being necessary to the life of another?

The source of food for a dog, a cat;
The giving of a gentle word when you did not know that such a word was desperately needed;
The sharing of so little at the crucial point of acute urgency;
The invasion of the mind and heart with a sense of Presence in which all of one's being suddenly becomes God's dwelling place.

Questions For Reflection

What sparks a flame within you?

What do you feel deeply?

What gives you energy?

What sparks your interest or curiosity?

Talk about an everyday moment that renewed your spirit or made you feel good.

Are there things you're interested in trying?

Closing Words

The Thread

Denise Levertov

Something is very gently,
invisibly, silently,
pulling at me—a thread
or a net of threads
finer than cobweb and as
elastic. I haven't tried
the strength of it. No barbed hook
pierced and tore me. Was it
not long ago this thread
began to draw me? Or
way back? Was I
born with its knot about my
neck, a bridle? Not fear
but a stirring
of wonder makes me
catch my breath when I feel
the tug of it when I thought
it had loosened itself and gone.

Preparing for the Next Session

The next session is the first of two that ask participants to clarify their values. Session 6 asks participants to focus on what is most important to them. Ask them to think about this in advance, and, if they keep one, to look through their calendars/planners to see what they spend their time doing.

Session 4: What Is Important?

For the Facilitator

This session focuses on what is important, and asks participants to compare what they say is important to them with what they actually do. If participants looked through their calendars, they might have more to share—don't make the analysis of calendars the focus of this exercise, it's just a tool to help people understand that they should be spending time on what is important to them...and that they might be spending more time on things that others say is important instead.

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting

Come into this place of peace
and let its silence heal your spirit;

Come into this place of memory
and let its history warm your soul;

Come into this place of prophecy and power
and let its vision change your heart.

-William F. Schulz (Reading #429 in *Singing The Living Tradition*)

Focus Reading

Excerpt from *Living On Purpose*

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

We need to find our hope. Because those feelings of despair disempower us and keep us from doing those things that we can do.

For decades in South Africa, people were jailed, killed, repressed, as they protested Apartheid. They must have lost hope, and they must have been tempted to despair. But they kept on in the face of oppression and danger, year after year, decade after decade, each making their choices to resist this injustice, doing what they could. And one day, unexpectedly, Apartheid was no more in South Africa.

For decades, people had been imprisoned and silenced, their rights had been denied, all over eastern Europe, including our Unitarian brothers and sisters in Romania. Their rights to religious worship were denied under a brutal system of communism. But people kept on asserting their rights, people kept on working for change, decade after decade with no break. And then one day, one night, overnight, the Berlin wall came

down. And it's all people making decisions about what they could do to resist, and getting together and working together.

There's a tipping point. And we don't know when it is. And it's important to remember, as the great rabbi Hillel said, who might have been Jesus' teacher, thousands of years ago, "In a world where no one is behaving as a human being, *you* must behave as a human being." More than that. We must behave out of our deepest humanity. We must become peacemakers. Now there are a lot of things we can do in the outer world to create a world of peace and justice, but I am absolutely convinced that the most important thing we can do for peace and justice, the most important thing we can do to bring about the kind of world that we dream of, is inner transformation. . . bringing forth within individual hearts and mind the seeds of wisdom, compassion, love and peace. There is no more urgent task, and your consciousness is your responsibility.

So how do you do that? You don't have to go off to Tibet and sit in a cave with your legs tied in a knot. You don't have to have a great vision, seek some esoteric teacher.

The way to be a peacemaker is very simple to understand. But it's difficult to do. The first thing is to treat everyone you meet with kindness and respect. And that means the clerk at the store, the waitperson at the restaurant. Yes, there's even a way to hang up on telemarketers kindly and with respect. There is. And that includes the people closest to you. Your families and friends. To treat them kindly and with respect. That's the way to become a peacemaker. Easy to understand, difficult to do.

The second way is to be quick to forgive. Because we're going to fail at this. We're only human. To be quick to forgive. To forgive ourselves and to forgive others. Because war is the result of people holding onto anger and seeing the other person through a set of ideas and not realities. Being quick to forgive is the way to be a peacemaker.

And it's important, too, to find a time in our lives to be silent, and to listen. To listen to our deepest heart, to life, to God, in whatever form that takes—prayer or meditation or just a quiet time. That's the way to become a peacemaker.

Now some of you have heard this many times so forgive me, but the way to become a peacemaker has to do with what you do with your time and what you do with your money. If you want to know what you really believe, not what you think you believe, not what you tell people at parties you believe, but if you want to know what you really believe, what kind of values you really hold, what kind of world you really want, there's a quick inventory you can do. You can look in your checkbook or its electronic equivalent, and you can look in your date book or its electronic equivalent, and you can see what it is you spend your time and money on. Are you giving those precious resources of your life in the service of the kind of world that you say you believe in? That is a matter of small decisions every day.

Questions For Reflection

What activity would be hardest for you to live without?

What is most important for you to do to feel whole—like you're living out your purpose in the world?

Are there things that others tell you should be important to you?

Which of these things do you agree with? Disagree with? Why?

What do you spend most of your time doing?

How can you spend more of your time doing things that are important to you?

Closing Words

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
Whatever is just, whatever is pure,
Whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable,
If there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

-Philippians 4:8

Preparing for the Next Session

The next part of values clarification is identifying what we hope for—which of our dreams and aspirations are most important. This might help participants understand what *should* be a priority in their life if they want to achieve these aspirations. You might ask participants to write down a story (less than one page) of something they've always wanted to do, and to share that story for check-in. It's also that point in the curriculum where you need to check in with every member of the group. Just find out how they're doing, what space they're in, and if they have needs that your faith community can help them address.

Session 5: Our Highest Aspirations

For the Facilitator

This session focuses on what participants aspire to do and be, and requires a somewhat safe space if participants are going to risk saying things that might not be popular or expected. Be sure to create that space here. If participants brought a story about something they've always dreamed of doing, you might weave those stories into the check-in, or into the first round of sharing after the focus reading. Be careful not to let this go on for too long.

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations,
and inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity.

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings
but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe,
to this community and to each other.

-Anonymous (Reading #434 in *Singing The Living Tradition*)

Focus Reading

Everywhere Incarnate

Rev. David E. Bumbaugh

Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as a result of a continuous process.

— *Humanist Manifesto I (1933), Second Affirmation*

When the Humanist Manifesto declared that we are part of nature and have emerged as the result of a continuous process, it not only denied the creation stories of the western religious traditions: It gave us an immensely richer, more complex history—one rooted in a system which invites not blind faith but challenge, correction and amendment, one which embraces "truth, known or to be known." It also gave us a language of reverence because it provided us a story rooted not in the history of a single tribe or a particular people, but a history rooted in the sum of our knowledge of the universe itself.

It gave us a doctrine of incarnation which suggests not that the holy became human in one place at one time to convey a special message to a single chosen people, but that the universe itself is continually incarnating itself in microbes and maples, in hummingbirds and human beings, constantly inviting us to tease out the revelation contained in stars and atoms and every living thing. A language of reverence for

Humanists begins with understanding this story as a religious story—a vision of reality that contains within it the sources of a moral, ethical, transcendent self-understanding.

We are driven to recognize a paradox: our sense of separateness is ultimately an illusion, yet our individual separateness is a consequence of the drive of the universe for differentiation and complexity. We are driven by our story to seek an ethic that respects the individual and the ground out of which the individual emerges. This implies a deep concern for ecological justice that reaches across class, racial, ethnic, even species distinctions and embraces a vision that responds to the largest sense of self we are capable of entertaining.

If the Manifesto was right to insist that we are part of nature, not separate from it, that we represent a continuing natural process, then it becomes clear that the challenges, the hopes, the dreams, the aspirations which find expression in our lives are not separate from the context in which we have evolved, in which we are rooted. We are not encapsulated, separated, isolated beings. Whatever we are, the universe is. The reality inside of us and the reality outside of us are ultimately one reality.

In us the universe dreams its dreams. In us the universe struggles for a moral vision. In us the universe hopes for new possibilities. In us the universe strives for self-understanding. In us the universe seeks the meaning of existence.

Questions For Reflection

What is it that you've always dreamed of doing?

What do you aspire to be?

What one thing do you hope people will say about you at your memorial service?

Who will support you in getting there?

What communities and relationships do you have that have helped you realize your dreams?

How do you experience your connection to the dreams of others?

Closing Words

Why should we live in such a hurry and waste of life?

We are determined to be starved before we are hungry.

I wish to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life.

I wish to learn what life has to teach, and not, when I come to die, discover that I have not lived.

I do not wish to live what is not life, living is so dear,

Nor do I wish to practice resignation, unless it is quite necessary.

I wish to live deep and such out all the marrow of life,

I want to cut a broad swath, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms.

If it proves to be mean, then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world;

Or if it is sublime, to know it by experience, and to be able to give a true account of it.

-Henry David Thoreau (Reading #660 in *Singing The Living Tradition*- can be read responsively if you have enough hymnals)

Preparing for the Next Session

The next session is about knowing your personal preferences and personality. If people have used instruments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or the Enneagram to look at their personality types, you might ask them to think about what they learned from that analysis, but don't ask them to talk about the jargon of the particular system they like. Perhaps participants will want to take a workshop on one of these systems in order to get to know themselves better—you might do a bit of research and come prepared to the next session with some places in your community where such resources are available (or web sites, even).

Session 6: Know Thyself

For the Facilitator

This session is about knowing your personality and your personal preferences—for how you communicate, for how you work, for how you interact with others in a variety of ways. While personality-type indicators such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator or the Enneagram are useful in the quest for self-knowledge, they all have their weaknesses and their misuses, so I strongly suggest that you not get into them here. You might refer people to workshops in your community if they're interested in pursuing such an option. The focus reading was chosen specifically to get people out of the analytical personality-test frame of mind and into a gut feeling level—try to stay there.

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting

Know thyself. Let each consider that whilst he is occupied in meek yet persevering reflexion upon his duty, privately comparing his own thoughts in the sincere wish to know what is true and what is right for him, he is really advancing in the scale of being.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Focus Reading

Cat People and Dog People

Jane Ellen Mauldin

There are two kinds of people in this world: cat people and dog people. I tried to be a cat person not long ago. My family even bought a house that came equipped with its own cat, a pretty white kitten that had been abandoned by its previous owners. We immediately adopted her and tried to love her. But cats, as Snowflake immediately notified me, allow them selves to be loved only on their own terms and at their own discretion.

Cat people, Snowflake reminded me, must have a strong sense of who they are, and be able to nurture themselves. They must be able to appreciate radical individualism. Cat people (forgive me if I slander) must also find some perverse satisfaction in loving someone who will never love them back.

It must be clear by now that I am, and always will be, a dog person. After putting up with our family for a year, Snowflake departed our neighborhood. Her leaving made room in our family psyche for what the children and I had long desired: a dog.

The newest addition to our family is a beautiful English springer spaniel named Hanna. She loves her people pathetically, licking my toes if I will let her. She begs to be around

us, and is miserable when we are gone for any length of time. She desperately needs us, and we dog people, who want to be needed, eat it up.

As a solid dog person since age four, I can say honestly that dog people are deeply interdependent. We need to be needed; we want to be slobbered over! We love cavorting like children and whispering sweet nothings to adoring eyes. There is nothing quite like the complete devotion of a dog, and we love it.

This world needs both kinds of people: cat people, who are able to work independently and quietly, content to know they are making a solid difference in the PTA, church or synagogue, and dog people, who make lots of noise, organize ball games, frolic with children, and tell everyone how wonderful they are.

However, the next time a stray cat comes to my house, I won't try to change my basic nature. I'm calling a cat person to come take it off my hands.

Questions For Reflection

Have you ever felt stuck in a job (volunteer or paid) that didn't fit your personality? How did it feel?

How would you describe your personality?

How would you describe how you interact with others?

Are you a cat person or a dog person, as Jane Ellen Mauldin would describe you?

What would be your ideal work environment? Home environment?

Closing Words

He who knows others is wise. He who knows himself is enlightened.

-Lao-tzu

Preparing for the Next Session

If you desire, bring some jazz music as a meditation background for use in the next session. Those of you familiar with the work of Sharon Welch (*Sweet Dreams In America: Making Ethics and Spirituality Work*) will understand that jazz is a powerful metaphor for being able to make mistakes in community—and the next session is about learning to love and live with our weaknesses. Consider reading Welch's book (at least the first chapter of it) as background before the next session, or even having copies available for group participants to read.

Session 7: Perfecting Our Imperfections

For the Facilitator

This session is one of the hardest in the curriculum, as it asks people to talk about their weaknesses and experiences overcoming obstacles and adversity; it also asks people to think about times when they've needed help, which is not always easy to do. Be prepared to have pastoral counseling available for people after this session from a minister or trained professional.

You might consider in this session having a brief meditation after the chalice lighting or the focus reading. I would suggest, in keeping with Sharon Welch's theme, that you use jazz music as the background to this meditation.

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting

The innovation, creativity, power, precision, beauty, and responsiveness that heal and affect people's lives...in positive ways may emerge as readily from our acknowledgement and check to each others' constitutive weaknesses as from building on each others' strengths.

-Sharon Welch, from *Sweet Dreams In America: Making Ethics and Spirituality Work*

Focus Reading

The Cracked Pot

author unknown

A Water Bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on one end of a pole that he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his master's house.

Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the Water Bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you."

"Why?" asked the bearer, "What are you ashamed of?"

"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The Water Bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path."

Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years, I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."

Each of us has our own unique flaws. We're all cracked pots. But if we will allow it, these flaws can be used to grace another's table. In the great economy of the universe, nothing goes to waste. So as we seek ways to minister together, and as you are called to use your gifts, don't be afraid of your flaws. Acknowledge them, and allow them to be a part of your beautiful wholeness, and you, too, can be the cause of beauty along the pathways of others. Go out boldly, knowing that in our weakness there is ultimately strength, beauty and purpose.

Questions For Reflection

How have you overcome adversity in your life? What did you learn from this process?

What are some of your weaknesses, and how have you learned from them?

What helps you be more compassionate to others in their time of need?

How have you helped others with things that they needed help doing? What did it feel like to help?

How have others helped you when you couldn't do something yourself? What did it feel like to be helped?

Closing Words

One who gains strength by overcoming obstacles possesses the only strength that can overcome adversity.

-Albert Schweitzer

Preparing for the Next Session

Consider asking people to bring objects to the next session that represent a time when they did something they thought they could not. If you do this, bring a pretty cloth to make an altar space for the objects and the chalice.

Session 8: Falling Naked On the Universe

For the Facilitator

This session focuses on fear and trust. Fear is one of the major obstacles to pursuing our dreams and hearing our call; trust is the major way we develop the courage to face our fears. Keep in mind that the main objective of this session is to help participants identify those support systems in their lives—family (biological or chosen), friends, congregations, etc—that can help them develop a sense of trust. This session is meant to empower participants to do things that they otherwise think they cannot, and this is the sense they should be left with after the session.

If participants brought objects, place them around the chalice on top of a pretty cloth to make an altar. Participants can weave explanations of the objects into the discussion in the second part of the session as they wish to.

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting

Trust

David O. Rankin, from *Dancing in the Empty Spaces*

When I trust:

I am able to engage in the process of discovering who I am and of creating what I will become.

I am able to function honestly and naturally without masks, defenses and deceptions.

I am able to reveal hidden desires and inner weaknesses without fear of criticism.

I am able to focus on constructive projects rather than brooding over imagined wrongs.

I am able to join in authentic relationships, in intimate sharing, and in personal dialogue.

I am able to appreciate the nature of others for what they do and what they are.

I am able to act in freedom with little regard for status, power, authority, or manipulation.

I am able to take risks, sail on fresh adventures, and explore the dark regions of the world.

I am able to touch the springs of consciousness and to see the inherent potential of life.

Trust is saying “Yes” to creation.

Focus Reading

How Superman Taught Me To Trust

Michael Tino

“*Fly. Don’t look, just fly.*” Many friends who have inquired about the source of this quote—one of my favorites—have been surprised to learn that this major source of inspiration in my life were the words of an airplane pilot to his co-pilot in *Superman:The Movie*, after the Man of Steel himself had single-handedly saved the imperiled plane from plummeting out of the sky. Sure, it may seem funny that so much inspiration might hinge on five words of an unmemorable scene from a movie based on a comic book. To a six year-old child, though, those words meant a whole lot.

When I was six, those words meant that I didn’t always need to understand why things happened the way they did. They meant that I could do something illogical—even unexpected—and have it turn out fine, because it was the right thing to do at the time. Fly a jet plane with one engine? Sure, if Superman is under the wing.

“*Fly. Don’t look, just fly.*” Five words spoken to a nervous co-pilot by his mentor, his teacher, his boss. Five words which meant a lot to an enthralled six year-old: Go ahead and do it. Trust me that it will be OK. Trust me that something, someone is holding up your wings and making sure you don’t fall. Don’t be afraid. *Fly.*

These words have become permanently lodged in my brain, coming to the surface from time to time to give me the courage to take some important—and risky—steps in my life. For a long time, this has been the voice I hear whenever I am afraid.

Fear is often a healthy reaction to danger. Fear lets us know when we’re pushing our boundaries, and is a natural reaction to growth and change. Because of this, fear is a useful emotion: fear properly identified can let us know exactly what we need to push ourselves to do. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “you must do the thing you think you cannot do.”

And while fear is overcome with courage, courage is an often-misunderstood trait. We tend to think that acting with courage means not being afraid at all. Instead courage, rather than being the absence of fear, is the ability to be afraid and still act.

Courage is not easy. To act despite one’s fears goes against all that fear represents. This is why the key to courage in my experience has always been trust. Trust that if I take a calculated risk, things will be OK. My friend Bob once described his enormous courage in making a dramatic career change as “falling naked on the universe and trusting that it will catch me.” That’s a lot of what taking a risk is, isn’t it? Trusting that no matter how big the leap is, the landing will be soft. Trusting that the universe, your God or Goddess, your family, your congregation, or your community of supportive friends and loved ones, will be watching out for you as you step into the unknown.

We need to learn to live our lives with trust. To me, trust is built through living in relationship with one another. By forming intentional, supportive communities, by listening and appreciating other people, and by being present with each other, we create the trust that allows us each to try, knowing that if we fail, everything will be all right. In creating trusting relationships with others around us, we know that we will be caught should we fall because we are living always ready to catch someone else—or at least to help them up, dust them off, and make sure they're OK.

You have more experience with trust than you might think. It is, in fact, inherent in each of our lives. Each of us lives our life wholly dependent on the things and people around us. To live in this world is to trust those things we cannot control—to acknowledge them and to go on in spite of them, sometimes because of them. And the truth is that not one of us here today knows exactly what will happen when we leave, what will come tomorrow, or next month, or next year.

So life itself, however aimless, takes trust. If we combine that with purpose and courage, we can gather the strength to do what we need to change our lives—to live out our values, to break out of our ruts, to try something new and bold and risky, to live the lives that we've imagined for ourselves.

So *fly*, my friends. Don't look, just *fly*. It probably won't be Superman holding up your wings, but if you act with purpose, confidence, courage and trust, you will soar.

Questions For Reflection

Have you ever done something you thought you could not do?

What are you afraid of?

What does "courage" mean to you?

How have your fears stopped you from living up to your potential?

How can being part of a community help you take risks?

Who do you rely on for support in your life?

How does that support help you develop courage?

What do you need in order to trust?

Closing Words

I've been absolutely terrified every moment of my life and I've never let it stop me from doing a single thing I wanted to do.

-Georgia O'Keeffe

Preparing for the Next Session

There is no particular preparation for the next session other than to ask people to think about what they've discovered in this class so far, and to ponder the following question: What might they have been keeping inside that takes all of these things into account? It's also time once again to check in with all of the participants in the group. These last two sessions have likely been somewhat intense, and they might need individual debriefs before going on to the portion of the curriculum where they will be asked to synthesize all that you've been talking about.

Session 9: Hearing the Call

For the Facilitator

This session encourages people to hear the song that is made when their gifts are used to meet the needs of the world. It is especially important to have sacred, safe space as people make these connections.

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting

Your gifts—whatever you discover them to be— can be used to bless or curse the world.

The mind's power,
the strength of the hands,
the reaches of the heart,
the gift[s] of speaking, listening, imagining, seeing,
waiting

any of these can serve to feed the hungry,
bind up wounds
welcome the stranger,
praise what is sacred,
do the work of justice
or offer love.

Any of these can draw down the prison door,
hoard bread,
abandon the poor,
obscure what is holy,
comply with injustice,
or withhold love.

You must answer this question:
What will you do with your gifts?

Choose to bless the world.

-Rebecca Parker

Focus Reading

Listening for Our Song

David S. Blanchard

On sabbatical in East Africa, I heard a story of a people who believe that we are each created with our own song. Their tradition as a community is to honor that song by singing it as a welcome when a child is born, as comfort when the child is ill, in celebration when the child marries, and in affirmation and love when death comes. Most of us are not welcomed into the world in that way. Few of us seem to know our song.

It takes a while for many of us to figure out which is our song, and which is the song that others would like us to sing. Some of us are slow learners. I heard my song not necessarily from doing extraordinary things in exotic places, but also from doing some pretty ordinary things in routine places. For every phrase I heard climbing Kilimanjaro, I learned another in a chair in a therapist's office. For every measure I heard in the silence of a retreat, I heard another laughing with my girls. For every note I heard in the wind on the beach at Lamu, I gleaned more from spending time with a dying friend as her children sang her song back to her. What came to astound me was not that the song appeared, but that it was always there.

I figure that the only way I could have known it for my own was if I had heard it before, before memory went to work making sense and order out of the mystery of our beginning. Our songs sing back to us something of our essence, something of our truth, something of our uniqueness. When our songs are sung back to us, it is not about approval, but about recognizing our being and our belonging in the human family.

It is good to know our songs by heart for those lonely times when the world is not singing them back to us. That's usually a good time to start humming to yourself, that song that is most your own.

They can be heard as songs of love or of longing, songs of encouragement or of comfort, songs of struggle or of security. But most of all, they are the songs of life, giving testimony to what has been, giving praise for all we're given, giving hope for all we strive for, giving voice to the great mystery that carries each of us in and out of this world.

Questions For Reflection

How do you use your gifts in service to others?

How do you bless the world?

If you would like one thing to be said about you at your funeral (many many years in the future, we hope), what would it be?

What is your purpose in the world?

What gets in the way of hearing your song—the essence of who you are and how you are meant to be a part of society?

Closing Words

I have spent my days stringing and unstringing my instrument while the song I came to sing remains unsung.

-Rabindranath Tagore

Preparing for the Next Session

Ask participants to think about how they aspire to live their faith—how their values show in the things they do everyday. This is what the next session will be about. You might ask them to recall the discussions in sessions 6 and 7, when you talked about values and aspirations.

Session 10: Putting Faith Into Action

For the Facilitator

This section specifically asks people to name those places where they can and do live out their values in the world. This might be a session you can follow up with some sort of group action, or service project. This would be a good idea if you have a group that's eager to do something together outside of group time.

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting

They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

-Isaiah 61:4

Focus Reading

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is to good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

-James 2:14-18,26

Questions For Reflection

How do you live out your values in the world?

What needs do you see in your community that you long to fill?

Has there been a time in your life that you've done something that made you feel like you made a real difference? Tell us about it.

Closing Words

People say, what is the sense of our small effort.

They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time.

A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that.

No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless.

There is too much work to do.

-Dorothy Day (Reading #560 in *Singing The Living Tradition*)

Preparing for the Next Session

Consider following up this session with a group service project. Perhaps group members can agree on something they would like to do together to live out their values in the community—whether in your town or city, in your congregation or on your campus. There are many different ways this can be done, from letter-writing campaigns to elected officials to feeding the homeless. Be creative and encourage group discussion about this.

The final session of this curriculum asks participants to make plans and move forward with them. Gauge if participants are ready to do this by checking in with them before the next session. You might want to make the last session bigger than just the meeting. Perhaps a potluck dinner is in order, or a meal out together after the meeting.

Closing Session: Following Your Path

For the Facilitator

This is the last session, and should be fairly light. While it gets at some of the same issues that the previous session did, this is not the time to push people. Perhaps, though, some of your pushing from last week will bear fruit here. Be prepared for that.

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting

Roads

Joy Cowley

I enjoy looking at other people's roads.
They are different from mine
and yet basically the same.
They all facilitate journey
from here to there,
from self to other,
and they are all interconnected.

The fact that I love my own road
with its comfortable landmarks
and familiar faces,
doesn't restrict my appreciation
for someone else's neighbourhood.

And if I go into another area
and walk a mile or two with someone else,
I return as a larger being.
The love of my own road is deepened,
the appreciation of other roads is widened,
and I am blessed with the knowledge
that all roads lead to God.

Focus Reading

Song of the Open Road

Walt Whitman (Reading #645 in *Singing The Living Tradition*)

Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road,
healthy, free, the world before me.

Henceforth I ask not good fortune—
I myself am good fortune;
strong and content,
I travel the open road.

I inhale great draughts of space,
the east and the west are mine,
and the north and the south are mine.

All seems beautiful to me;
I can repeat over to men and women,
You have done such good to me,
I would do the same to you.

Whoever you are, come travel with me!
However sweet these laid-up stores—however convenient this dwelling, we cannot
remain here;
However sheltered this port, and however calm these waters, we must not anchor
here;

Together! the inducements shall be greater;
We will sail pathless and wild seas;
We will go where winds blow, waves dash, and the Yankee clipper speeds by under full
sail.

Forward! after the great Companions!
and to belong to them!
they too are on the road!

Onward! to that which is endless,
as it was beginningless,
to undergo much, tramps of days, rests of nights,

To see nothing anywhere but what you may reach it and pass it.
To look up or down no road but it stretches and waits for you—
To know the universe itself as a road—
as many roads—
as roads for traveling souls.

Questions For Reflection

What have you gained from being here with us for this time?

What is next on your path?

How can we help you take the next step?

Closing Words

Beauty is before me, and
Beauty behind me,
above me and below me
hovers the beautiful.
I am surrounded by it,
I am immersed in it.
In my youth, I am aware of it,
and, in old age,
I shall walk quietly the beautiful trail.
In beauty it is begun.
In beauty, it is ended.

-From the Navajo people of North America (Reading #682 in *Singing The Living Tradition*)

Preparing for the Next Session

You might be surprised to even find this section here, as there is no next session in this curriculum. The group, however, might want to go on, with or without another curriculum. It's important to check in with all of them to see what comes next. Perhaps you can do this as a final meeting, or a meal together, or just in individual phone calls or meetings.

Further Reading

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“Everywhere Incarnate,” by Rev. David E. Bumbaugh, from *UUWorld*, Volume XV, Number 5 (November-December 2001), p.15. This piece is an excerpt from his essay, “Toward a Humanist Vocabulary of Reverence,” which appeared in *First Days Record*, April 2001. Reprinted by permission of the author.

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Closing Session

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