

UU Conversations for Liberation

Discussion Guide for Congregations, Fall 2019

Together, we must dig deeper to advance our shared aspiration towards a Unitarian Universalism that practices the liberating values of our theology.

—Susan Frederick-Gray

Congregational Leader: Before the session, please read the document, [“Invitation to Conversations for Liberation”](#), on the UUA website. It is a letter signed by representatives of UUA staff and other UU organizations. You may wish to provide the letter to group participants in advance of this session.

After the session, return to the UUA website to share back your discussion highlights using this [Feedback Form](#) and add your faith community to an [interactive map](#).

Purpose of This Session

In the summer of 2019, a group from UUA staff and other UU organizations began meeting to address conflicts arising in Unitarian Universalist communities around the call to dismantle white supremacy in our faith movement. Meetings led to a shared framework and an invitation for Unitarian Universalist faith communities to engage in broad, shared discussion: How will we move our faith forward toward greater justice?

In order for our movement to hold together in these times, today’s Unitarian Universalists are challenged individually and collectively to find their faith anew. This session in the small group ministry format invites Unitarian Universalists to consider how their personal faith—their spiritual needs, understandings, and gifts—can be, honored, expressed, restored, or amplified in Unitarian Universalist community.

The session includes instruction to gather reflections and responses that participants wish to lift up to others in Unitarian Universalism. Contributions received by **December 20, 2019** will be compiled by UUA staff into a summary report which will be made available to participating congregations.

How to Use This Session

This session follows a 75-minute format common to Unitarian Universalist small group ministry (also known as chalice circles or covenant groups). Use the Opening and Closing provided; these help to enclose the time and space participants will share.

A gathering of eight or more will enjoy deeper interaction by smaller-group sharing. Be ready to invite one or more participants, as needed in addition to yourself, to facilitate a small group. You might ask a few people ahead of time if they are willing to facilitate. Each small group facilitator will need a timepiece and a copy of this guide.

Congregations are asked to convene this session before the 2019 winter holidays. It is recommended that the session occur after coffee hour that follows a Sunday worship. Another viable time could be a weeknight. Please offer, promote, and implement this session in a way that welcomes all the diversities within your faith community.

MATERIALS

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Computer with Internet access and large monitor or projector, speakers, and screen
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Paper/pens and/or a laptop for note-taking
- Timepiece(s)

PREPARATION

- Read the [“Invitation to Conversations for Liberation”](#) on the UUA website. Optional: Provide this letter by electronically or print copies to share with your community before the session.
- Preview the [video](#), “What does it mean to embody ‘The Power of We’?” an introduction to breakout sessions given at General Assembly 2019. You will show just the first one minute and forty-five seconds of the video, a presentation by UUA co-moderators Barb Greve and Elandria Williams.
- Find some quiet time before beginning the session. Ground yourself in a spiritual discipline you practice, or simply take a few minutes to breathe, transition into this session, and release any concerns.
- Write these questions on newsprint, and set aside:
 - When is a time that you felt “the power of we” in Unitarian Universalism?
 - What is so important in Unitarian Universalism that you would be willing to sacrifice for it?
 - What will it take for Unitarian Universalism to fully embody “the power of we”?

- Write these suggested covenant guidelines on a sheet of newsprint, and set it aside:
 - Speak from one's own experience and perspective.
 - Listen generously to the experiences and perspectives of others.
 - Resist making assumptions about one another.
 - Be mindful of "taking space and making space" so that all have opportunities to listen and speak.
 - Expect and respect confidentiality of others' sharing.
 - Expect and accept that questions may linger.
- Test equipment and cue the video.
- Set out the chalice.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING (15 minutes)

Welcome participants. Thank participants for gathering together.

Model a brief introduction (your name, pronouns, and role in the congregation) and invite each participant to introduce themselves.

Invite a participant to light a chalice while you read aloud these opening words, from Rev. Theresa I. Soto's book of poetry, *Spilling the Light*, used with permission:

*To be free, you must embrace
the breadth of your own existence
without apology, even if they try to take
it from you. You must know, not that you
can do whatever you want; you are not
a kudzu vine, eating entire hillsides for
the purpose of feeding your own lush life. You
must know instead, that inside you are entire
Universes—milky blue, magenta, and gold—
expanding. But to actually be free, you must
know and you must fight for the entire
Universes inside of everyone else.
Being free is not a license, but
A promise.*

Invite the participants to agree on how to be in relation with another so the group can for the next hour share a covenanted space together. Post the newsprint with covenant guidelines and read them aloud. Ask for any questions or additions. Invite the group to indicate agreement with the guidelines.

Remind the group of the purpose and goals of this gathering, using these or similar words:

Last June's UUA General Assembly had the theme, "The Power of We." The GA recognized that in order for our movement to hold together in these times, today's Unitarian Universalists are challenged to find their faith anew. We are here today to consider our personal faith—our individual spiritual needs, understandings, and

gifts—and to reflect together on how a personal faith is, or can be, honored, expressed, restored, or amplified in Unitarian Universalist community.

The GA delegates were invited into small group reflection and discussion. Today's session brings this invitation to our UU community.

Introduce the video. Explain that at General Assembly, co-moderators Mr. Barb Greve and Elandria Williams introduced this reflection at GA and that is what we will see here.

Show the first 1:45 of the video clip. Stop the video with these questions on the screen:

- When is a time that you felt “the power of we” in Unitarian Universalism?
- What is so important in Unitarian Universalism that you would be willing to sacrifice for it?
- What will it take for Unitarian Universalism to fully embody “the power of we”?

Leave the image of the questions on screen for the remainder of this session. If you have written the questions on newsprint sheets, post the sheets now.

REFLECTION AND RESPONSE (15 minutes)

Invite participants into a one- or two-minute time of quiet, personal reflection to gather their initial responses to the questions. Say that they may focus on whichever question speaks most urgently to them. Say that when reflection time ends, each participant will have a chance to share, uninterrupted, in a group.

While participants reflect, decide whether you need to form small groups for this sharing activity. An ideal group has 4-7 participants, plus a facilitator to keep time. Based on the groups' sizes, calculate how much time each group member may be allotted to speak (between two and three minutes).

Close the reflection time. Then, form smaller groups as needed and assign facilitators (you may also facilitate a small group). Announce how many minutes each individual is allotted to speak and say that it is alright to pass.

Small Group Facilitators: Once settled in a group, invite participants to take a deep breath together. Ask them to consider the posted questions and respond, one at a time, as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while participants form their responses. Gently keep speakers to their allotted time. Make sure each one has a chance to speak or to pass.

DEEPER IN CONVERSATION (25 minutes)

If you have formed small groups, remain in small groups for this activity.

Invite participants to take in all they have thought, heard, and said in the previous sharing activity. Say that this next activity invites deeper conversation. Encourage participants to address one another with questions of clarification, points of resonance, or moments of discomfort, but to avoid debate. Remind everyone of the posted covenant. You may wish to briefly go over its points again.

The facilitator of each small group may take notes or assign a volunteer. In note-taking, try to capture themes that emerge or comments that re-occur; it is not necessary to document the entire conversation.

TAKE-AWAYS TO SHARE (15 minutes)

Regather the large group. Invite participants to take a few moments to come out of their heads and into their bodies. You might lead a stretch break. You might suggest a bio break.

Ask what participants what themes, concerns, or hopes emerged from their conversations that they would like to share with the wider Unitarian Universalist movement. Designate a note-taker—if possible, someone who can record contributions on a laptop. Tell the group that their comments shared with the UUA by December 10, 2019 will be included in a summary report available throughout Unitarian Universalism.

Congregational Leader: At the end of this activity, gather the notes, electronically or on paper. Immediately after the session use this [Feedback Form](#) on the UUA website to share the group's contribution and add your faith community to the [Interactive Map](#). You will need to log in to the UUA website to use the form and the map.

CLOSING (5 minutes)

Share these words by Rev. Leslie Takahashi, used with permission:

All that we have ever loved

And all that we have ever been

Stands with us on the brink

Of all that we aspire to create:

A deeper peace,

A larger love,

A more embracing hope,

A deeper joy in this life we share.

Extinguish the chalice.