

# Facing Death with Life



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## About the Authors

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## Preface

As this program came to life over several years, death was a part of our own lives. Lee Ann’s mother died in December 2004 from cancer. Kate’s mother died in May 2006 after a 30-year struggle with multiple sclerosis. One day before her mother’s death, Kate’s uncle died a lonely, isolated death in his apartment after intentionally neglecting his diabetes. Two months later, still raw, Kate had to euthanize her dog, who in many ways was her best friend.

Death was present as this program evolved. Church members died and others approached death. The deaths we have experienced are not necessarily unusual in their occurrence or even their frequency. Death permeates our society every day. Headlines tell us of war in faraway countries, local murders, and fatal car accidents. We worry about neighbors serving in the military and attend memorial services for family members, colleagues, and friends. While those who live surrounded by war or widespread outbreaks of life-threatening disease experience death more than others, death is a part of all human experience.

Despite the constant presence of death, dying, and grief in our lives, we in the Western world rarely speak of it openly and directly. We are particularly reluctant to speak of our own deaths. The one institution that should lead the way in fostering and supporting such conversations is the faith community, but our faith communities often seem to neglect this inevitable part of life.

Unitarian Universalists have become quite good at creating memorial services that focus on celebrating the life of the deceased. These services are personal and reflect the person's life rather than focusing on their death and where they may or may not be after death. Memorial services are supported by humor and music and often allow family and friends to share stories. After attending a UU memorial service, many people from other faiths have noted what a wonderful and healing event it was for them and how much they wish their own faith community would do something similar. Yet, until now, Unitarian Universalists did not have a death and dying curriculum published by the Association. The two of us decided to take the lead and create our own.

Since writing this program a few years ago, we have been pleased to see the conversation on death and dying expand in the public forum. Despite political and cultural efforts to suppress the public conversation, U.S. society is slowly moving forward in its willingness to read, talk, learn, and embrace the idea that we're all going to die one day. While Unitarian Universalist ministers have been quietly and individually working with eager congregants across the country on pastoral issues having to do with death, dying, and grief, we are delighted to offer this adult faith development resource for lay and professional Unitarian Universalist leaders to help people prepare for the moment when death finally arrives at its own pace and in its own place.

— Kate Walker and Lee Ann Wester

November 2015

## **Facilitator Feedback Form**

We welcome your critique of this program, as well as your suggestions. Thank you for your feedback! Your input improves programs for all of our congregations. Please forward your feedback to:

Faith Development Office  
Ministries and Faith Development  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
24 Farnsworth Street  
Boston, MA 02210-1409  
religiouseducation@uua.org

Name of Program or Curriculum:

Congregation:

Number of Participants:

Age range:

Did you work with (a) co-facilitator(s)?

Your name:

***Overall, what was your experience with this program?***

***What specifically did you find most helpful or useful about this program?***

***In what ways could this program be changed or improved (please be specific)?***

***Did you enrich the program with any resources that you would recommend to others?***

***What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your life going forward?***

***What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your congregation going forward?***

## **Participant Feedback Form**

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***What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your life going forward?***

***What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your congregation going forward?***

## The Program

*If you would indeed behold the spirit*

*of death, open your heart wide*

*unto the body of life.*

*For life and death are one, even as the*

*river and sea are one. — Kahlil Gibran*

This program facilitates a process of personal reflection, learning, and spiritual growth focused on the topic of death and dying. It brings death, dying, and grief into the light of our daily lives and out of the dark, macabre recesses to which we often relegate it. The program is not a grief support group, nor is it an intellectual study of death. It includes sociological information and reflection, theological reflection, personal and shared narrative, creative expression, journaling, and practical learning and preparation. It helps participants move from viewing death as an abstract concept to developing a personal recognition of its meaning in their life, with the goal that all who participate in the program find a closer and more comfortable relationship with their own inevitable death. This program invites participants to experience death and dying as a healthy part of

life, including the preparation, the moment of death, the grieving, and the living on.

Facing Death with Life includes eight two-hour workshops, plus material for participants to read or view in preparation for each workshop. In addition, one or more field trips to a funeral home, cemetery, or crematorium are recommended between Workshops 7 and 8. The eight workshops build upon each other in both content and development of community. The program culminates with participants sharing their creative projects during the last workshop.

## Goals

This program will:

- Build community among participants and increase their comfort in talking about death and dying
- Invite participants to find their own personal meaning and theology of death
- Offer information about cultural and religious perspectives on death
- Invite participants to reflect on experiences of grief and bereavement
- Provide information about how to prepare children for the death of a loved one

- Provide opportunities for participants to discuss and reflect on both suicide and death with dignity
- Provide practical information about end-of-life decisions and advance directives
- Help participants prepare for their own deaths and those of their loved ones.
- Willing and able to thoroughly prepare for each workshop
- Effective at speaking, teaching, and facilitating group process
- Flexible and willing to modify workshop plans to support the full inclusion of all participants

## Leaders

A team of two adults should facilitate these workshops. It is recommended that one leader be a religious professional or a leader with a counseling background, because some of the activities and discussion may evoke difficult memories or unresolved experiences for some participants.

Leaders must also seek to form and nurture community within the group as participants move through emotionally and spiritually challenging territory. Seek leaders who are:

- Knowledgeable about Unitarian Universalism
- Committed to the Unitarian Universalist Principles, to the congregation, and to the faith development components of this program

- Able to listen deeply and to encourage participation of all individuals
- Able to demonstrate respect for individuals, regardless of age, race, social class, gender identity, ability, and sexual orientation
- Able to honor the life experiences each participant will bring to the program.

In addition, leaders should understand their personal experiences with death, dying, and grief. It is helpful if leaders share their own journeys as a way to introduce themselves to participants. Two sample reflections, written by the program's authors, can be found at the end of this Introduction: Leader Resource 1, Kate Walker's Reflection on Death, and Leader Resource 2, Lee Ann Wester's Reflection on Death.

## Participants



This program is intended for adults. The workshops are equally suitable for first-time visitors and longtime congregation members. Leaders should be attentive to the differences in knowledge and life experience participants bring to the group, particularly if the group includes a wide age span and diverse cultural identities.

These workshops include significant time for personal sharing, so the ideal group size is 8-12 people. Workshops of fewer than 6 participants can do the small group activities as a full group. A group with more than 12 participants should be divided into two groups for sharing activities, with a leader in each group. If your group numbers 25 or more participants, a third leader is necessary.

## Integrating All Participants

Review [Accessibility Guidelines for Adult Workshop Presenters](#) and implement as needed for your group.

## Program Structure

At the end of each workshop, participants will be given Internet links to material to read or view in advance of the next workshop. Workshops often include secular materials about the topic in

question and offer many resources for further reflection and study.

## Arrangements to Make in Advance

Many of the workshops include video clips. In many situations, the easiest way to share those clips is to stream them from the recommended website.

However, if this is not possible in your setting, the recommended videos are generally available in public libraries and for purchase.

### For Workshop 7:

- Invite a medical professional with experience in end-of-life medicine, palliative care, or hospice care to explain some common end-of-life medical choices as well as advance directives.
- Obtain copies of the [Five Wishes booklet](#) for all participants. Order them (at a small cost) from the Aging with Dignity website.

### For Workshop 8:

- Prepare a creative work about death and dying—a photograph, drawing, painting, poem, prose, song, music, ceramic piece, dance, or some other creative expression.

### Field Trip(s):

(Recommended between Workshops 7 and 8, although the trip(s) may come any time after Workshop 6)

Arrange for a guided group visit to a funeral home, crematorium, or a cemetery. You may choose to do more than one trip.

The purpose of a trip to a funeral home or crematorium, or both, is to allow participants to speak directly with a funeral director and learn firsthand about cremation, embalming, and burial as well as other funeral preparations (for example, casket prices, Social Security and veterans' benefits, death certificates).

The purpose of the cemetery visit is to explore an important section of a local city or town, to gain familiarity with the local history of the cemetery, to reflect on our culture's desire to have a place set aside to mark the lives of family and friends, and to consider one's personal desire to have a marker in a cemetery or not. Invite a local cemetery guide or historian to accompany your group.

## **Leader Resource 1: Kate Walker's**

### **Reflection on Death**

I was eight years old when my maternal grandfather died. He was a thousand miles away in Chicago, and I barely knew him. I learned about his death when I discovered my mother packing a suitcase. She told me she was going to Chicago because grandfather was dying, or already dead. I'm still not clear about this, because it was such a nonevent. My mother returned a week later and that was that. I don't remember any real conversation about how he died. My mother was a stoic, so she appeared unaffected by his death. Looking back, I'm sure she was deeply affected, because she idolized her father.

This was my first lesson in death. Like everyone else, my first death experience taught me how to feel and treat death for the rest of my life: The best way to deal with death is with distance and pragmatism.

When I was 23 years old my father died from pancreatic cancer. This was the single most important event in my life. Although I was determined to treat my father's death with distance and stoic pragmatism, my whole life changed with that event. There were only six weeks between his diagnosis and his death, barely giving me time to cope with the shock. The cancer had taken his

pancreas and was in his liver, so his oncologist carefully told him how to avoid an overdose of his morphine, thereby telling him exactly what he needed to do not only to ease his pain but also to end his life. I was not with him when he died, but three weeks before he died, he managed to fly to Colorado where I lived to spend three days with me and say good-bye. The last time I saw my father, he was sitting in a first class seat on a United Airlines flight headed for Chicago. He wanted to fly in comfort for his last flight home, a metaphor I've always liked.

Thanks to my attempts at distance and pragmatism, I was in no way prepared for the grief that hit me over the next two years. I spun in a wild collection of emotions: anger, deep grief with a touch of hysteria. Without a doubt I was influenced in my grief by the death of my two beloved childhood dogs and my cat in the two years preceding my dad's death. My gratitude for my friends and, in particular, my stepmother, Marlene, is beyond measure.

My next lesson in dying and death: Distance is only a temporary defense measure, and pragmatism only helps in arranging events like the memorial

service and closing personal affairs. The real work cannot be put off forever.

Twenty years later, I was with my mother as she ended her 30-year struggle with multiple sclerosis. My two older brothers and I had taken turns caring for her as her disease made her sicker. I had primary care for her the last four years of her life. The pain of watching her body slowly disintegrate over those 30 years was nothing compared to the pain I felt while watching her mind disintegrate over the last year. My maternal uncle's unexpected death alone in his apartment the day before my mother's death was a cruel shock that deepened my family's grief and pain.

While my father's death was sudden and shocking, my mother's death was one I had prepared for and anticipated for many years. I felt relief when her suffering was over. Yes, I experienced shock, but not to the degree I had 20 years prior. I also felt guilt with my mom's death, guilt fed by thoughts that I could have done more to relieve her suffering, guilt that I could have been more patient with her as I balanced my family and career commitments. I could have made her death easier, I thought, as all her medical decisions were my responsibility. My father had never relinquished control over his

medical decisions, thereby intentionally choosing the circumstances of his death once he accepted his prognosis. My mother's circumstances were my decision, but I was guided by her thoughts from years of conversations we had with each other.

My parents' deaths were very different, yet there were similarities. Death has its common human experience in the realm of emotions: loss, guilt, shock, fear, loneliness, anger, pity, relief. Tender and raw moments follow a death, moments that bring us together into the depths of the human journey. It is what bonds us in compassion and sympathy. Compassion and sympathy made my mother's death a healthier process than my father's. I was prepared as much as anyone can be, and I was open to being helped and loved by my family and my church members. My gratitude for them is beyond measure.

My mother's death gave me another important lesson in death: Despite our best efforts to shroud ourselves in illusions of independence, this journey from birth to death is not done alone. Yet, when we face the final moments of death, each of us must enter it alone, leaving the stunning beauty of life behind as we enter the unknown. It is the ultimate act of faith.

## **Leader Resource 2: Lee Ann Wester's Reflection on Death**

A few months after my mother's death, my minister, Kate Walker, approached me and asked if I would be interested in helping her put together a curriculum on death and dying. The timing was serendipitous, and I enthusiastically joined her in this endeavor. I, too, feel that a church community needs to openly face death to fully live life. The following is my journey through grief. Although your experience with grief may be different, in the end, I believe the lessons we learn from our losses are universal. For me, facing death helped me to find meaning in life.

My mother died of breast cancer on December 14, 2004. I was 32 years old. I think I was in survival mode during those first weeks after her death. I simply completed tasks one by one to get through each day: empty the dishwasher, wash the clothes, fold the clothes, bathe the kids, feed the husband, breathe, swallow. Social situations were extremely difficult. I had this feeling of being separate from the group. I was on the outside looking in. I was completely numb. Soon, though, the invisible

blanket of detachment would be ripped away, leaving me naked and vulnerable.

My emotions soon set in. Deep surges of sadness and uncontrollable crying washed over me, usually at night. I gave myself up to it—totally helpless and out of control. At other times I experienced intense feelings of anger. Many times I thought I was going crazy. I felt as if all my nerves were growing on the outside of my body; the slightest touch could produce excruciating pain. I can understand now why in times past people wore black when they were in mourning. It signaled to others to tread softly around them, to treat them more kindly and gently. The hardest part for me at this time was shopping at Walmart. I don't know what it was about that place, but every time I went shopping there, it was inevitable that I would become an emotional basket case and leave the store crying and feeling the stares of other customers.

Looking back I think Walmart represented my inability to deal with the trivialities of life. A new shirt? A fishing pole? Motor oil? Cosmetics? Vacuum cleaner? Who cares! My mother is dead. Death has a way of bringing into focus the truly important things in life. I couldn't deal with the meaningless stuff in Walmart, and I couldn't deal

with the people concerned about the meaningless stuff. I began to pull away from others. In March, a few months after my mom's death, I stayed at home and slept. I'm sorry to say that my children watched a lot of television that month. I literally could not lift my body from the couch.

I awoke as if from a trance and began to walk around again. The nights of uncontrollable crying were lessening, and I was afraid of that. Losing the intense emotions made me afraid that I would lose her in some way. At this stage I went into the woods. I found comfort in the predictable patterns of nature: the movement of the sun, the waves on the water, the markings on the bark. I felt comforted sitting in this natural peace and feeling the rhythmic pulses of life. No surprises here, just a steady roll of continuing cycles. I took my children and dog with me. They were also my security and my comfort. But always, always, this deep sadness in the pit of my stomach.

The theological questions began to surface. Where is she? Will I ever see her again? Will she give me some sign that she's okay? Where is God in all this? I listened for answers. Silence. Nothing.

Slowly, my mother did return to me. She slipped into conversations, she appeared within the bloom of a flower, she smiled at me through my children.

One evening my husband and I took our kids to the drive-in movie theater. Suddenly I started laughing, and my kids asked me what I was laughing about. I told them about the time when my mom was a young girl, and she wanted to go to the drive-in movie theater, but she couldn't find anyone to go with her. So she put her cat in a paper bag and took him with her to watch the movie. The kids laughed and laughed and asked me to tell them another story about her. So I told them about the time when she trimmed her hair and accidentally shaved off her left eyebrow. She didn't know it until someone told her at work. They took pictures. Her stories are their stories now. She is alive in our family still.

Joseph Campbell, the American mythologist, wrote, "Life is without meaning. You bring the meaning to

it." Grief has taught me that. Life just is. The question is not what is the meaning of life? but rather what are we going to do with this life to create meaning?

Slowly I began to find footholds in the side of the mountain. I began to pull myself up and create meaning from the pain. I have discovered that my grief has been a gift to me. My grief has given me heightened appreciation for everyday life, not to take for granted the little pleasures: the sunrise, a morning good-bye kiss to my husband, lunch with a friend, fresh strawberries, an evening walk, the sunset, a bedtime story with my children. Grief has taught me not to sweat the small stuff and to be less materialistic. Grief has made me examine who I really am inside and has awakened creative passions. Grief has taught me to be more sensitive to others. But most important, grief has taught me about the power of love. Yes, indeed, love does endure for all eternity.

# Workshop 1: Talking about

## Death

### Introduction

*In the end, people don't view their life as merely the average of all its moments—which, after all, is mostly nothing much plus some sleep. For human beings, life is meaningful because it is a story. A story has a sense of a whole, and its arc is determined by the significant moments, the ones where something happens.*

*Measurements of people's minute-by-minute levels of pleasure and pain miss this fundamental aspect of human existence. A seemingly happy life maybe empty. A seemingly difficult life may be devoted to a great cause. We have purposes larger than ourselves. — Atul Gawande, author of*

*Being Mortal*

This workshop invites participants to begin exploring their own emotions, experiences, and perspectives on death and dying in a safe, covenanted group. Using strategies such as brainstorming of euphemisms, sharing quotes, discussion, and meditation, participants are invited

to begin to share stories with one another about what can be a difficult topic.

Participants will begin creating a loose-leaf notebook journal. To encourage them to decorate and personalize the journal, create and personalize your own. As you prepare to facilitate this session, add to your own journal quotes that speak to you or stories that come to mind, so you can model this for participants.

### Goals

This workshop will:

- Provide processes and activities to help people express thoughts and feelings about death that they may be unable to express directly
- Guide participants into learning the art of listening, or “listening with the ear of the heart”
- Provide a variety of perspectives on death and dying and invite participants to identify ones that most speak to them
- Invite participants to begin exploring their own emotions, experiences, and perspectives on death and dying.

### Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Get to know one another and establish a covenanted group
- Start a personal journal for creative journaling and for collecting handouts and other readings
- List euphemisms and slang words for death, listening for what this indicates about what people are unable to say directly
- Explore perspectives on death and dying from public figures past and present, popular culture, and literature
- Begin to contemplate their own emotions, experiences, and perspectives on death and dying.

## Workshop-at-a-Glance

Activity	Time
Opening	15 minutes
Activity 1: Creating a Covenant	10 minutes
Activity 2: Death Talk	10 minutes
Activity 3: Readings from the Common Bowl	25 minutes

Activity 4: Grief and Loss in <i>Up</i>	20 minutes
Activity 5: Guided Meditation	15 minutes
For Next Time	10 minutes
Closing	5 minutes

## Materials

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- 4'x4' black cotton cloth
- Several small cups of colored sand
- One chalice large enough to hold all the sand
- One candle
- Handout 1, Quotes for the Common Bowl
- Handout 2, Looking Ahead to Workshop 2
- Decorative bowl, lightweight enough to pass around
- Scissors
- Three-ring binders with clear plastic covers, one for each participant
- Three-hole punched paper, both lined and unlined
- Computer or video player, speakers, and screen



## Preparation

- Lay out black cloth on table. Fill cups with different colors of sand and place around the outside edge of the black cloth. Put chalice and candle aside.
- Write on newsprint and post:
  - My name is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - What am I hoping to get out of this program?
  - What thoughts and emotions come to the fore when I reflect on death and dying?
  - What do I need to leave behind to be present in this group?
- Post blank newsprint and label it “Our Covenant.”
- Make copies of Handout 1, Quotations for the Common Bowl. Cut one copy into strips as indicated. Place the quotes in the bowl.
- Customize and make copies of Handout 2, Looking Ahead to Workshop 2.
- Obtain the video *Up*. Many public libraries have copies of the film.
- Copyright law requires that you seek permission to show copyrighted video in any context other than your own home. Seek

permission from Swank Motion Pictures to show a clip from *Up* of fewer than 15 minutes. Contact Meghan Edwards ([medwards@swank.com](mailto:medwards@swank.com); 800-876-5577). Cost is \$100.

- Test equipment and speakers; queue and preview scenes 2 and 3 of *Up*.
- Review Arrangements to Make in Advance in the Introduction, and prepare to share any information you have with participants.
- Review [Accessibility Guidelines for Adult Workshop Presenters](#) and implement as appropriate for your group and space.

## Opening (20 minutes)

Welcome participants. Share these words from Amy Tan in her novel *Saving Fish from Drowning*:

*Here the lessons of Buddhism seemed true, Vera thought. Life was merely an illusion you must release. As she grew older, she was aware of her changing position on mortality. In her youth, the topic of death was philosophical, in her thirties it was unbearable, and in her forties unavoidable. In her fifties, she had dealt with it in more rational terms, arranging out the organ*

*donation, detailing the exact words for her living will. Now, in her sixties, she was back to being philosophical. Death was not a loss of life, but the culmination of a series of releases. It was devolving into less and less. You had to release yourself from vanity, desire, ambition, suffering, and frustration—all the accouterments of the I, the ego. And if you did, you would disappear, leave no trace, like the mist at dawn over the lake, evaporating into nothingness, into nibbana. (p. 229)*

Gather all around the chalice table. Call attention to the prompts you have posted on newsprint and read them aloud. Say your name and respond briefly to the posted questions. Then, pick one or two cups of sand and gently spill some sand on top of the black cloth, creating a design. Invite participants to each do the same in turn. When all have spoken and poured their sand, ask participants to pick up the edges of the cloth and shake the sand toward the center. Then, pour the sand into the chalice. Put candle in the sand, and light it. Say, “All of our fears, hopes, and expectations for our time together are now held within the

chalice. As we join in this symbolic circle, I share these chalice lighting words by Kate Walker”:

*This circle reminds us of the journey from birth to death.*

*This circle compels us forward with curiosity.*

*This circle holds our fear.*

*This circle is filled with our compassion.*

*This circle has questions, answers, and truth rarely known.*

*We long to be connected, to be heard and seen, and to fully live.*

*Yet we fear the day when we will each leave this life.*

*But we know that the circle of life will go on, beginning and ending, again and again.*

## **Activity 1: Creating a Covenant (10 minutes)**

Invite the group to create a covenant together. Say, “What would make this group productive and safe for you?” List responses and encourage discussion until consensus is reached. As appropriate, seek

the approval of the group to add items that are important to you, such as:

- We agree to start and end on time.
- We agree to speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
- We agree to listen respectfully to the experiences and perspectives of other people.
- We agree to pay attention to the group process, making sure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and to listen.

Raise the issue of confidentiality if participants do not do so. Ask them to come to consensus on how much, if any, of the stories shared in the group can be shared outside the group. Often, groups agree that participants may freely share their own stories outside the group, but not those of other people, except in the most general of terms (for example, “Many of the members of my group have experienced the death of a parent, and it was harder than they expected”). When you have reached consensus on the points in your covenant, ask all participants to assent by nodding or speaking.

### **Activity 2: Death Talk (10 minutes)**

Invite participants to brainstorm a list of euphemisms, metaphors, and slang for death, burials, funerals, and so on, capturing the list on posted newspaper. Ask, “What does this list indicate about what people are unable to say directly?”

### **Activity 3: Readings from the Common Bowl (25 minutes)**

Introduce this activity using these or similar words:

*As we reflect on death, dying, and grief in this program, we will practice deep listening to both our own inner thoughts and feelings and the thoughts and feelings of others. This exercise, developed by the Reverend Barbara Hamilton-Holway, invites us to read aloud and share quotes after drawing them from a common bowl. Some quotes are more heartfelt, some more spiritual, others more intellectual. The quotes with which you have the most connection may indicate your preferred comfort zone—heart, spirit, or head—when talking about death. Being aware of our own comfort zone may prepare us to honor differences in the group. Rather than bringing another into our comfort zone around the topics of death, dying, and grief,*

*choose to listen and be with them in their own. Hamilton-Holway calls this “listening with the ear of the heart.”*

Pass the bowl of quotes around the circle and invite each participant to pick one, read it, and pass the bowl. Allow time for silence in between each quote. If time allows, go around the circle a second time.

Lead a discussion using these questions:

- Which quotes spoke to you and why?
- There were quotes that talked about emotions surrounding death, quotes you might describe as spiritual, and quotes that talked about the facts of death. What kinds of quotes did you find yourself drawn to?
- Were there quotes that made you uncomfortable?
- Were there quotes that triggered memories?

Distribute copies of Handout 1, Quotes for the Common Bowl, and invite people to write memorable quote(s) in their journals or to write for a few minutes, reflecting on the experience with sharing quotes.

### **Activity 4: Grief and Loss in *Up* (20 minutes)**

Say, “You may have seen the Disney Pixar movie *Up*. In it is a story of death and grief that sets the stage for subsequent action. Let’s watch just that part of the film.” Share scenes 2 and 3 of the video, which will take about ten minutes.

Invite comments and observations. Ask, “What about Carl’s experience speaks to you?”

### **Activity 5: Guided Meditation (15 minutes)**

Invite participants to settle down and relax.

Lead a guided meditation using these words:

*Remove things from your hands, and place your hands comfortably on your lap. Place your feet flat on the ground. Your eyes may be open or closed as desired. Take slow, deep breaths, release each with intention, let go of any worries or concerns.*

*Remember a time when you first experienced a death. What was happening?*

*What were you feeling? Sadness?*

*Confusion? Fear? Love? Remember to*

*breathe deeply and slowly. Are those*

*feelings still with you today? Experience*

*them. It’s okay to feel them. Do you want*

*them with you tomorrow? Or do you want to let them go? It's your choice. Breathe deeply and slowly. This first time of experiencing a death will be with you always. How do you want it to influence you tomorrow? It's your choice. I invite you to let go of the fear. Let go of the guilt. Invite love in. Let love into your heart and body. Slowly, as you're ready, come back. Signal you're ready by opening your eyes.*

Allow time for comments and reflections.

### **For Next Time (10 minutes)**

Share with participants upcoming plans so that they are prepared for upcoming workshops. Tell them that Workshop 7 will include presentations by professionals about advance directives, living wills, and end-of-life medical needs, and that in Workshop 8, they will be invited to share their artistic response to death and dying, such as a photograph, drawing, painting, poem, prose, song, music, ceramics, or dance. Assure them that although they may feel initial resistance, nonjudgmental sharing of this kind will yield delightful surprises. Details about this will come in future workshops. Share your plans to visit a

funeral home, cemetery, or crematorium to learn about funeral preparations. Set a date for the field trip(s), if you have not done so already.

Distribute Handout 2, Looking Ahead to Workshop 2.

Ask participants to read the materials listed and to bring one or two personal objects as described on the handout.

Explain that the section Find Out More in the handout lists additional resources they may wish to explore.

### **Closing (5 minutes)**

Extinguish the chalice and share these words by Kate Walker:

*As we bring this time to a close, we recognize that each moment leads to a new experience. With the passage of time, we stretch ourselves to remember the past, to live in the present, and to anticipate the future. This time that we hold is gone with a breath, we cannot hold that breath, nor can we fully anticipate the next. We are always letting go and greeting the new.*

### **Leader Reflection and Planning**

Make a time for individual reflection and discussion with your co-leader after the conclusion of the workshop. Consider these questions:

- What worked well in today's workshop?  
How can these elements or approaches be repeated or amplified in the future?
- What was most challenging? What could be done to make these parts easier or more effective?
- At what points were participants most and least engaged?
- Were all voices in the group heard?
- Was the room set up in a way conducive to group functioning?
- Did you have all the resources you needed?
- Did you feel prepared for any pastoral issues that emerged in the course of the workshop? How did you—and the group—respond? Is there anything you would do differently?
- Were your practical and spiritual preparation time adequate?
- Are there opportunities for improvement and modification in advance of the next workshop?

## Handout 1: Quotes for the Common Bowl

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me. — Psalm 23 (KJV)

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The state of death is one of two things: either the dead man wholly ceases to be, and loses all sensation; or according to the common belief, it is a change and a migration of the soul to another place... But now the time has come, and we must go hence; I to die, and you to live. Whether life or death is better is known to God, and to God only. — Plato

---

*Dukkha*. All is impermanence. Nothing lasts. I thought of that yesterday, watching leaves come down in a shower, and the smell of the rotting ones going back into the earth. Leaf to humus and back to earth to nourish the roots of the mother tree. The crows crying as the leaves fall and their nests are exposed: dukkha...all is impermanence.

And life goes on, and people who were with us last year at this time have died, all souls pass on, all is dukkha, nothing lasts. — Elizabeth Tarbox

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Woe, destruction, ruin, and decay;

The worst is death, and death will have his day. — William Shakespeare

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Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. — Matthew 5:4 (NRSV)

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The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time. — Mark Twain

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We know not when, we know not where, we know not what that world will be; but this we know: it will be fair.  
— Christina Rossetti

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So let me die laughing, savoring one of life's crazy moments. Let me die holding the hand of one I love, and recalling that I tried to love and was loved in return. Let me die remembering that life has been good, and that I did what I could. — Mark Morrison-Reed



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It hath often been said, that it is not death, but dying, which is terrible. — Henry Fielding

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Because I could not stop for Death—

He kindly stopped for me—

The Carriage held but just Ourselves—

And Immortality... — Emily Dickinson

---

I decided to devote my life to telling the story because I felt that having survived I owe something to the dead.

That was their obsession to be remembered, and anyone who does not remember betrays them again. — Elie

Wiesel

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No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because Death is very likely

the single best invention of Life. It is Life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new. —  
Steve Jobs

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To die completely, a person must not only forget, but be forgotten, and he who is not forgotten is not dead. —  
Samuel Butler

---

And death shall have no dominion, dead man naked they shall be one with the man in the wind and the west  
moon... Though lovers be lost love shall not; And death shall have no dominion. — Dylan Thomas

---

Death is the supreme festival on the road to freedom. — Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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There is no such thing as a natural death; nothing that ever happens to a man is ever natural, since his  
presence calls the world into question. All men must die: But for every man his death is an accident and, even  
if he knows it and consents to it, an unjustifiable violation. — Simone de Beauvoir

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Boy, when you're dead, they really fix you up. I hope to hell when I do die somebody has sense enough to just dump me in the river or something. Anything except sticking me in a goddam cemetery. People coming and putting a bunch of flowers on your stomach on Sunday, and all that crap. Who wants flowers when you're dead? Nobody. — J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*

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Man is the only animal that contemplates death, and also the only animal that shows any sign of doubt of its finality. — W. E. Hocking

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Men are convinced of your arguments, your sincerity, and the seriousness of your efforts only by your death. — Albert Camus

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Do not seek death. Death will find you, but seek the road which makes death a fulfillment. — Dag Hammarskjöld

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You are now before the Yama, King of the Dead. In vain will you try to live, and to deny or conceal the evil deeds you have done. The Judge holds up before you the shining mirror of Karma, wherein all your deeds are reflected. — Tibetan Book of the Dead, III

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Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. — Julia Ward Howe

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From my rotting body, flowers shall grow and I am in them and that is eternity. — Edvard Munch

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Life is better than death, I believe, if only because it is less boring, and because it has fresh peaches in it. — Alice Walker

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Life would be as insupportable without the prospect of death, as it would be without sleep. — Countess of Blessington

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Death is the last fact of which we can be certain. — Geraldine Jewsbury

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A human being does *not* cease to exist at death. It is change, not destruction, which takes place. — Florence Nightingale

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Death! It is rest to the aged, it is oblivion to the atheist, it is immortality to the poet! — Ouida

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Death is a debt we all must pay. — Euripides

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What we call the beginning is often the end, and to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from. — T. S. Eliot

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One pities most those who loved, and still died. Only those who love, dread death. — Craig Rice

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Watching a peaceful death of a human being reminds us of a falling star; one of a million lights in a vast sky that flares up for a brief moment only to disappear into the endless night forever. — Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

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I don't want to die. I think death is a greatly overrated experience. — Rita Mae Brown

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Death is the ultimate disappearing act. — Kate Green

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Death is a slave's freedom. — Nikki Giovanni, speech at Martin Luther King Jr.'s funeral

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Her mother was no longer there. Susanna did not think of it as death, but as a fading away, like a pattern on washed cloth. It was the continuation of something that had been happening all her life anyway. — Margaret Atwood, "Uncles"

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When I think of ages past  
That have floated down the stream  
Of life and love and death,  
I feel how free it makes us  
To pass away. — Rabindranath Tagore

## Handout 2: Looking Ahead to

### Workshop 2

*In the end, people don't view their life as merely the average of all its moments—which, after all, is mostly nothing much plus some sleep. For human beings, life is meaningful because it is a story. A story has a sense of a whole, and its arc is determined by the significant moments, the ones where something happens.*

*Measurements of people's minute-by-minute levels of pleasure and pain miss this fundamental aspect of human existence. A seemingly happy life maybe empty. A seemingly difficult life may be devoted to a great cause. We have purposes larger than ourselves. — Atul Gawande, author of Being Mortal*

#### For Next Time

Read these articles to prepare for the next workshop:

- Laine Bergeson, "[Good Life, Good Death](#)," *Utne Reader*, September/October 2005. "[Love and Death](#)," a sermon preached

by the Reverend Forrest Church (1948-2009).

- Anjula Rasdan, "Kickin' It," interview with [Six Feet Under's Alan Ball on grief and dying, American Style, Utne Reader](#), September/October 2005. Bring one or two personal objects representing who you are, what you values are, and what you want to pass on to family. If it works better, bring a photograph or something that represents the object.

#### Looking Ahead

Workshop 7 [date] will include presentations by professionals about advance directives, living wills, and end-of-life medical needs.

In Workshop 8 [date], you will be invited to share a creative work about death and dying, such as a photograph, drawing, painting, poem, prose, song, music, ceramic piece, dance, or some other creative expression.

Provide information about plans to visit a funeral home and cemetery or crematorium to learn about funeral preparations. Set a date for the field trip, if you have not done so already.

#### Find Out More



- [Six Feet Under](#), HBO dramatic comedy series created and produced by Alan Ball. It features a California family who owns and operates a funeral home. Many public libraries have the DVDs.
- "[Being Mortal](#)," *Frontline*, PBS, February 10, 2015. This video documentary explores the intersection of life, death, medicine, and what matters in the end. This may be viewed free online.
- [Holding Our Own](#), gentle, direct, and celebratory treatment of our final life passage. This video must be purchased from its producer, Fuzzy Slippers Productions..
- [Love and Death: My Journey through the Valley of the Shadow](#) was the last book written by Unitarian Universalist minister Forrest Church (Beacon, 2009).

## Workshop 2: Finding Our

### Personal Views of Death

#### Introduction

*When death or dying comes calling at the door, like a bracing wind it clears our being of pettiness. It connects us to others. More alert to life's fragility, we reawaken to life's preciousness. To be fully human is to care, and attending to death prompts the most eloquent form of caring imaginable. —*

Forrest Church

This workshop invites participants to go a little deeper in finding their personal views of death and dying as they explore firsthand stories of people facing their own or loved ones' deaths—a Unitarian Universalist minister, a writer, a television show producer, and a professor. Participants consider their awareness of their mortality and share stories of objects that represent what they would like to pass on when they die.

Send a reminder to participants two or three days ahead of the workshop and include information about preparation from Workshop 1, Handout 2, Looking Ahead to Workshop 2.

#### Goals

This workshop will:

- Provide a process for examining personal feelings about one's own death and dying in a safe and comfortable environment
- Invite participants to consider their own mortality and what legacy they would like to leave for others.

#### Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Explore stories of people facing their own or loved ones' deaths
- Reflect on their own mortality and what makes a good death
- Share stories of objects that represent what they would like to pass on when they die.

#### Workshop-at-a-Glance

Activity	Time
Opening	5 minutes
Activity 1: Discussion of Readings	15 minutes

Activity 2: A Good Death	20 minutes
Activity 3: The Last Lecture	30 minutes
Activity 4: What I Want to Pass On	35 minutes
For Next Time	5 minutes
Closing	10 minutes

## Materials

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED/battery-operated candle
- Our Covenant from Workshop 1
- Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 3
- *Singing the Living Tradition*, the UUA hymnbook, for the alternate Opening activity
- Three-ring binders with clear plastic covers, one for each participant who does not already have one
- Three-hole punched paper, both lined and unlined
- Computer or video player, speakers, and screen
- [Randy Pausch's A Final Farewell](#) video (5:14), Wall Street Journal Online

- Optional: *Randy Pausch's Last Lecture*, "[Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams.](#)"

If you are unable to stream the lecture from the Internet, purchase a copy of the DVD from Carnegie Mellon University or obtain a copy from your public library

## Preparation

- Read the articles listed under For Next Time in Workshop 1, Handout 2, Looking Ahead to Workshop 2.
- Post Our Covenant from Workshop 1.
- Customize and make copies of Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 3, for all participants.
- For Activity 2, A Good Death, write on newsprint and post:
  - Has there ever been a time when death pierced your defenses and you realized that you are truly mortal?
  - Do you feel reconciled to your death?
  - Has your idea or reality of death ever been "out of character"?
  - What is a good death to you?

- Test equipment and speakers; queue and preview *Randy Pausch's A Final Farewell*.
- Review [Accessibility Guidelines for Adult Workshop Presenters](#) and implement as appropriate for your group and space.
- Optional: If you will share a portion of "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams," queue the segment (54:38-1:02:53).

*Yet to stay forever now.*

*Autumn marches on.*

Or share Reading 718 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, "All Souls" by May Sarton.

Call attention to the covenant you have posted and ask participants to reaffirm their willingness to let it guide your time together.

## Opening (5 minutes)

Light the chalice and share these words from Lee

Ann Wester:

*Autumn marches on,*

*Mighty Oaks stand still and yet,*

*Flaky, brittle oak leaves filter sunlight,*

*Hanging on until,*

*The frost bites and the rain drills.*

*The leaves let go and surrender*

*To their fate.*

*And so each must meet the same,*

*To know that we must someday go,*

## Activity 1: Discussion of Readings (15 minutes)

Share this quote from Forrest Church's sermon

"Love and Death":

*When death or dying comes calling at the door, like a bracing wind it clears our being of pettiness. It connects us to others. More alert to life's fragility, we reawaken to life's preciousness. To be fully human is to care, and attending to death prompts the most eloquent form of caring imaginable...*

*Adversity doesn't always bring out the best in people. But the reason it so often does is because adversity forces us to work within tightly drawn limits. Everything within those limits is heightened. We receive as gifts*

*things we tend to take for granted. For a brief, blessed time, what matters to us most really does matter.*

*Yet, how do we respond, when we get a terminal sentence? Far too often with, "What did I do to deserve this?"*

*"Nothing." The answer is, "Nothing." Against unimaginable odds, we have been given something that we didn't deserve at all, the gift of life, with death as our birthright.*

*Unless we armor our hearts, we cannot protect ourselves from loss. We can only protect ourselves from the death of love. Yet without love, nothing matters. Break your life into a million pieces and ask yourself what of any real value might endure after you are gone. The pieces that remain will each carry love's signature. Without love, we are left only with the aching hollow of regret, that haunting emptiness where love might have been.*

Ask for comments and observations from the materials participants were asked to read. Ask:

- What resonated from the sermon or the articles?

- What thoughts, hopes, and fears you have about death were expressed in one of the readings?
- What thoughts, hopes, and fears do you have that were not expressed?

Capture participants' comments on newsprint.

## **Activity 2: A Good Death (20 minutes)**

Share this quote from "Good Life, Good Death" by Laine Bergeson:

*Humans are gifted with the ability to contemplate their own demise, and this weird blessing infuses every moment of life with the inevitability of death. That said, we're remarkably good at making our date with death seem so far away we doubt we'll have to keep it. If an event pierces our defenses and makes our mortality vivid, we quickly return to living as we usually live, as if the odds against death are stacked in our favor.*

Post the questions you have written on newsprint.

Invite participants to move into groups of three. Ask them to each respond to the posted questions while others listen with the ear of the heart. Allow five

minutes for each person to speak, and use a chime or bell to signal time to move to the next speaker.

Regather the large group and ask, “How did it feel to tell your story and talk about a good death?”

### **Activity 3: The Last Lecture (30 minutes)**

Introduce the video, saying, “Randy Pausch was a professor at Carnegie Mellon University. He was also a member of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. When he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and given a short time to live, he delivered his 'last lecture' to his students. A video of the inspirational lecture has been viewed by millions of people, and you may want to watch it at home yourself. This video is about Pausch’s last lecture and his thoughts about his approaching death. He died on July 25, 2008, at the age of forty-seven.”

Show *Randy Pausch’s A Final Farewell*. You may also choose to show a portion of *Randy Pausch’s Last Lecture* (54:38-1:02:53). Tell participants that their take-home handout for this workshop will have information about viewing the entire lecture.

Lead a discussion asking:

- What is your reaction to this story?
- Why do you think his lecture was so popular?
- What do you think you might do under circumstances similar to Pausch’s?

### **Activity 4: What I Want to Pass On (35 minutes)**

Ask participants one by one to share the objects they have brought representing who they are and what their values are. Ask them to share how each object represents what they would like to pass along to their family, tangible or intangible. Invite participants to share their objects and their reflections with loved ones after the workshop.

### **For Next Time (5 minutes)**

Share with participants any updates on upcoming plans. Distribute Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 3. Ask participants to read the articles listed for next time.

Tell participants that Find Out More includes additional resources they may wish to explore.

### **Closing (10 minutes)**

Go around in the circle and have participants share, one at a time, one word that describes an experience of death they have had. Be sure to advise that passing is an acceptable option. Share these closing words from Laine Bergeson's "Good Life, Good Death":

*Death is like an unmapped land—a place our minds can't fully comprehend, but on the perimeters of which we are summoned to both new spiritual depths and sheer terror. Maybe our only call, both for ourselves and for our culture in denial, is to acknowledge this strange tension and learn to live with it. As others have noted, intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at one time. Perhaps living an honest life means having the ability to do the same with death.*

Extinguish the chalice.

## **Leader Reflection and Planning**

Make a time for individual reflection and discussion with your co-leader after the conclusion of the workshop. Consider these questions:

- What worked well in today's workshop?  
How can these elements or approaches be repeated or amplified in the future?
- What was most challenging? What could be done to make these parts easier or more effective?
- At what points were participants most and least engaged?
- Were all voices in the group heard?
- Was the room set up in a way conducive to group functioning?
- Did you have all the resources you needed?
- Did you feel prepared for any pastoral issues that emerged in the course of the workshop? How did you—and the group—respond? Is there anything you would do differently?
- Were your practical and spiritual preparation time adequate?
- Are there opportunities for improvement and modification in advance of the next workshop?

## Handout 1: Looking Ahead to

### Workshop 3

*When death or dying comes calling at the door, like a bracing wind it clears our being of pettiness. It connects us to others. More alert to life's fragility, we reawaken to life's preciousness. To be fully human is to care, and attending to death prompts the most eloquent form of caring imaginable. —*

Forrest Church

#### For Next Time

To prepare for the next workshop, read:

- [Beliefs about Life and Death in Unitarian Universalism](#), at UUA.org.
- Rachel Nuwer, "[The Seven Ways to Have a Near-Death Experience](#)," , *BBC News*, March 3, 2015.
- [An Outline of Different Cultural Beliefs at Time of Death](#), a booklet published by Loddon Mallee Regional Palliative Care Consortium in Australia.

In your journal, write about any death rituals, religious or secular, that are familiar to you.

#### Find Out More

Carnegie Mellon University has made Randy Pausch's last lecture, [Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams](#) (1:16:26), available online. It was delivered at the university on September 18, 2007.

[Reading Our Lives](#), a reflection by Marshall Hawkins, *UU World*, September 2007.

## Workshop 3: Beliefs and Practices – What Happens When We Die?

### Introduction

*In the wake of each loss we are inclined to curse the existence that deals out so many hardships, but many Unitarian Universalists emerge from their grieving with a sense of renewed faith in life, which offered them strength and hope when they most needed it. Life gives us more than it takes from us.*  
— *Rev. John H. Nichols*

This workshop gives participants a chance to explore death, dying, mourning, and bereavement in a cultural context. Participants explore perspectives of various religious traditions, including Unitarian Universalism, their own



experiences with mourning rituals, and current scientific understanding of what happens at time of death. This overview prepares participants for a more personal exploration of bereavement in Workshop 4.

Send a reminder to participants two or three days ahead of the workshop and include information about preparation from Workshop 2, Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 3.

## Goals

This workshop will:

- Invite participants to explore the death and mourning beliefs and practices of a number of different religious traditions, including Unitarian Universalism
- Engage participants in discussion of anecdotal stories and scientific research concerning near-death experiences
- Provide opportunities to contemplate personal beliefs about death, dying, and mourning.

## Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Explore beliefs and practices about death and mourning from Unitarian Universalism and some other religious traditions
- Share their own experiences with death and mourning rituals and practices
- Examine anecdotal stories and scientific research on near-death experiences
- Reflect on what they believe happens at the time of death and afterward, and what difference these beliefs make in their living.

## Workshop-at-a-Glance

Activity	Time
Opening	5 minutes
Activity 1: Cultural and Family Beliefs and Practices	40 minutes
Activity 2: Journaling	15 minutes
Activity 3: Near-Death Experiences	30 minutes
Activity 4: What Happens When We Die?	20 minutes
For Next Time	5 minutes
Closing	5 minutes

## Materials

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED/battery-operated candle
- Our Covenant from Workshop 1
- Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 4
- Handout 2, All Our Losses
- Three-ring binders with clear plastic covers, one for each participant who does not already have one
- Three-hole punched paper, both lined and unlined
- Color pencils, markers, pens, and pencils
- Meditative music and player
- Computer or video player, speakers, and screen
- [What Happens Inside a Dying Mind?](#) video (2:17), *The Atlantic*, March 19, 2015. Or watch the video yourself or read "[The Science of Near-Death Experiences](#)" by Gideon Lichfield (*The Atlantic*, April 2015) and prepare to briefly summarize the contents
- Optional: Handout 3, Loss: The Litmus Test of a Religious Faith

## Preparation

- Read materials listed in Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 3, from Workshop 2.
- Post Our Covenant from Workshop 1.
- Customize and make copies of Handout 1 for all participants. Make copies of Handout 2, All Our Losses and, if desired, Handout 3, Loss: The Litmus Test of a Religious Faith.
- Write on newsprint and set aside for Activity 1, Cultural and Family Beliefs and Practices:
  - What spiritual or religious traditions guide your expectations about what should happen at the end of life?
  - In your experience, what role does family play in end-of-life decisions?
  - What role would you like your immediate or extended family to play in end-of-life decisions for you? For your loved ones?
- Test equipment and speakers; queue and preview *What Happens Inside a Dying Mind?*, or prepare a brief summary of the contents.

- Review [Accessibility Guidelines for Adult Workshop Presenters](#) and implement as appropriate for your group and space.

## Opening (5 minutes)

Light the chalice and share these words from the Omaha Nation:

*No one has found a way to avoid death,*

*To pass around it;*

*Those old ones who have met it,*

*Who have reached their place where death stands waiting,*

*Have not pointed out a way to circumvent it.*

*Death is difficult to face.*

Call attention to the covenant you have posted and ask participants to reaffirm their willingness to let it guide your time together.

## Activity 1: Cultural and Family Beliefs and Practices (40 minutes)

Share this quote from "An Outline of Different Cultural Beliefs at the Time of Death," a resource for health-care workers in the Australian state of Victoria:

*The final authority on all of a dying person's needs must come from the person themselves, with some guidance or input from their family. These are the people who can best advise a healthcare worker as to their needs or requests at this stage in their life.*

And this one from the Unitarian Universalist Association website:

*Unitarian Universalist views about life after death are informed by both science and spiritual traditions. Many of us live with the assumption that life does not continue after death, and many of us hold it as an open question, wondering if our minds will have any awareness when we are no longer living. Few of us believe in divine judgment after death. It's in our religious DNA: the Universalist side of our tradition broke with mainstream Christianity by rejecting the idea of eternal damnation.*

*Unitarian Universalist memorial services and funerals are moving occasions. Because our tradition has no "one way" of doing funerals, our ministers are able to create personalized services that mourn*

*and celebrate the unique individual who has died.*

Invite comments and observations about the health-care workers guide from Australia and the piece from the UUA website. Ask:

- What did you find surprising or intriguing in your reading?
- What made you want to know more?

If participants are familiar with the traditions highlighted in the booklet or with any not mentioned, invite them to share additional information. Allow about 15 minutes for this part of the activity.

Then, invite participants to form groups of three. Post the questions you have written on newsprint. Allow 15 minutes for triads to share reflections. Then gather the larger group and invite small groups to share highlights of their discussion. Record on newsprint.

### **Activity 2: Journaling (15 minutes)**

Call attention to the available color pencils, markers, pens, and pencils. Invite participants to write or draw, responding individually in their journals to the questions and discussions in the

group. What rituals and practices do they observe at the time of the death of a loved one? What rituals and practices are important to observe at the time of their own death? Ideally, what role does family play at the time of death and bereavement?

### **Activity 3: Near-Death Experiences (30 minutes)**

Share this quote from “The Science of Near-Death Experiences” by Gideon Lichfield:

*As medical technology continues to improve, it's bringing people back from ever closer to the brink of death. A small, lucky handful of people have made full or nearly full recoveries after spending hours with no breath or pulse, buried in snow or submerged in very cold water. Surgeons sometimes create these conditions intentionally, chilling patients' bodies or stopping their hearts in order to perform complex, dangerous operations; recently they have begun trying out such techniques on severely injured trauma victims, keeping them between life and death until their wounds can be repaired.*

*All of this makes NDEs perhaps the only spiritual experience that we have a chance of investigating in a truly thorough, scientific way. It makes them a vehicle for exploring the ancient human belief that we are more than meat. And it makes them a lens through which to peer at the workings of consciousness—one of the great mysteries of human existence, even for the most resolute materialist.*

Share the video with the group. Then ask for observations and comments. Lead a discussion, asking:

- What can we learn from the reports of near-death experiences?
- What do these reports and recent scientific findings tell us about the nature of humanity and the nature of life and death?

## **Activity 4: What Happens When We Die? (20 minutes)**

Invite participants to reflect on their own theology of death. What happens to a person after death?

Allow five minutes for participants to reflect in silence or by drawing or making notes in their

journal. Then, invite participants each in turn to share their reflections as they are comfortable. Remind them that passing is always an option.

### **For Next Time (5 minutes)**

Share with participants any updates on upcoming plans. Distribute Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 4, and Handout 2, All Our Losses. Either distribute copies of Handout 3, Loss: The Litmus Test of a Religious Faith, or include a link to the handout in your customization of Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 4. Ask participants to read the documents listed for next time.

Tell participants that the Find Out More section includes additional resources they may wish to explore.

### **Closing (5 minutes)**

Share these closing words from Kate Walker:

*Our beliefs are varied,*

*but we are united by our mortality.*

*We may not know death,*

*but we know loss.*

*We may not see what's next,*

*but we seek assurance.*

*Let love both ease our death,*

*and soothe our soul.*

Extinguish the chalice.

## Leader Reflection and Planning

Make a time for individual reflection and discussion with your co-leader after the conclusion of the workshop. Consider these questions:

- What worked well in today's workshop?  
How can these elements or approaches be repeated or amplified in the future?
- What was most challenging? What could be done to make these parts easier or more effective?
- At what points were participants most and least engaged?
- Were all voices in the group heard?
- Was the room set up in a way conducive to group functioning?
- Did you have all the resources you needed?
- Did you feel prepared for any pastoral issues that emerged in the course of the

workshop? How did you—and the group—respond? Is there anything you would do differently?

- Were your practical and spiritual preparation time adequate?
- Are there opportunities for improvement and modification in advance of the next workshop?

## Handout 1: Looking Ahead to

### Workshop 4

*In the wake of each loss we are inclined to curse the existence that deals out so many hardships, but many Unitarian Universalists emerge from their grieving with a sense of renewed faith in life, which offered them strength and hope when they most needed it. Life gives us more than it takes from us.*

— Rev. John H. Nichols

### For Next Time

To prepare for the next workshop, read:

- Handout 2, All Our Losses
- Optional: Handout 3: Loss: The Litmus Test of a Religious Faith.

- Bruce Bower, "[Bereaved Relatives Helped by Chance to View Body after Sudden Loss](#)," *Science News, US News and World Report*, May 11, 2010.
- "[Coping with Grief When a Loved One Dies](#)," *National Institutes of Health News in Health*, November 2009.
- Cari Romm, "[Understanding How Grief Weakens the Body](#)" *The Atlantic*, September 11, 2014.

### Find Out More

- Gideon Lichfield, "[The Science of Near-Death Experiences](#)" *The Atlantic*, April 2015.
- [Understanding Cultural Issues in Death](#), Griefspeaks.com.
- [Understanding Grief within a Cultural Context](#), Cancer.net.

## Handout 2: All Our Losses

This text is from a 1988 UUA pamphlet written by John H. Nichols. Used with permission.

### Turning points

When our parents left us at summer camp the first time, when our first pet died, when our best friend

moved to another community, we grieved. We suffered what seemed, then, a very serious loss. The road to maturity is paved with losses and griefs.

Our smaller losses condition the ways we respond to life's major losses, for which no one is ever fully prepared. These could include the loss of a parent, the loss of a spouse through death or divorce, the loss of a job, a favorite home, or a stage of life that seemed promising. Times like these are turning points for everyone. Our personal universes are shattered by these events, and we seek wisdom and strength to carry on while we adjust to living with the change that has happened. In these moments Unitarian Universalists want the support of their religious faith.

When we suffer a serious setback it is tempting for most people to ask, "Why me?" ... [People] have always wondered if there is some cosmic connection between what they have done or thought and a loss that seems like God's punishment. Responding to this feeling, some religious traditions have taught that God is indeed the author of losses, that God causes losses to happen in order to teach us a lesson or to test our faith. Believing this, some people have smothered

their anger or grief for years so that they do not appear weak or faithless. Angry at God, but unable to express it, they turn their anger, instead, upon those they love most.

### **Strength and perspective**

Unitarian Universalists do not believe in a God who uses losses and tragedies either to punish or teach. The feelings that sweep over us in grieving, however uncomfortable and strange, are essential to rebuilding our personal worlds so that we may become more accepting of a life that contains joy and sorrow. We want our churches and fellowships to be communities that will be with us at times of loss, to comfort and to wait with us in the confidence that we will emerge from our grief with greater strength and perspective.

Each person's journey to maturity is necessarily singular, but in our approach to loss there are remarkable similarities in what has been helpful to us. Often we differ only in the words we choose to describe the turning points in our lives.

When they anticipate or experience a serious setback, many people look for a religious belief that will ease their panic and take away their pain.

Unitarian Universalists believe that each person's

religious ideas evolve not as much out of a faith that is given to us or inherited as from the life experiences that leave us with a feeling of confidence in the goodness of life and in our ability to enjoy it. To achieve a better perspective on the Unitarian Universalist response to loss, we asked six religious liberals to speak about difficult life experiences and the lessons they learned.

### **Affection and compassion**

"Coping," Barbara Kirkpatrick asks, "What is coping? Often it is breathing in and breathing out while struggling to keep one's essential affairs in order despite emotional desolation. Sleep brings respite, but at every awakening a devastating numbness, a feeling of unreality, returns.

"Time and a sense of responsibility for oneself and others bring a new level of coping. The isolation of sorrow is breached by the touch of another's love and need and pain, and the numbness yields a little. The presence of affection and compassion in dear ones remaining around me becomes a tangible warmth, now, and I am able to allow it to flow into my experience. Time is part of coping. Experiencing the beautiful new sweetness of the loves who are left to me is part of coping. The pain ever so gradually becomes an underlying given in



my life—always there even when not in conscious awareness. I find it shedding a subtle glow on day-to-day living, highlighting the preciousness of love, of contact with others, of keeping lines of communication open.

"Coping is also paying attention to what is yet within my power to effect, to change, to move, to teach, to become. So loss, ironically, by the sharpness of its contrast, brings appreciation of gain, and even, in time, celebration."

### **To grieve and to heal**

No one welcomes serious loss. It disrupts our lives and our equilibrium. Few people, at the moment of loss or even for a long time afterward, can say, "Maybe I'll grow from this." Many religious liberals testify that growth occurs when we can allow grieving time for its expression. One person remarked that after an intimate encounter with disappointment she found that she had become a more effective and loving person.

Katrina Finley writes, "I have learned the value of getting angry rather than staying depressed. I have learned to take more risks and not worry so much about perfection. I have learned to say yes more often to my legitimate needs and wants without guilt

or apologies. I have learned that in order to face down my fear of lacking my own authority to act I must exercise my energies and love, for these define me. I have learned to give myself more to others in order that by being myself in their presence they can feel it is all right to be themselves. I have experienced sharing love with my children, other members of my family, and friends, and when I love someone, I tell them and show them how much. In all the laughter and beauty around me I've experienced what it means to have self-love and to take the time I need to grieve and to heal and to take care of myself."

### **To affirm life**

In the wake of each loss we are inclined to curse the existence that deals out so many hardships, but many Unitarian Universalists emerge from their grieving with a sense of renewed faith in life, which offered them strength and hope when they most needed it. Life gives us more than it takes from us and we express this feeling in several ways—some choose traditional religious language and others their own.

Kathryn Polhemus speaks of "an innate sense of optimism I've found during hard times. Because I've been able to grow in my life and become more and

more who I need and want to be, I feel a confidence that whatever happens I'll be able to get through it and learn from it."

Frances M. Bancroft explains, "I handle my losses by having a faith in an expanded reality out there that encompasses those I've lost and other mysteries. And in my family's tradition, where the job of those who survive a crisis is to go on with life, I go on, and by so doing, affirm life."

### **You are not alone.**

In a sermon, "The Faith That Sustains Us," one of our ministers, George K. Beach, describes the sacred: "The understanding that is not so much achieved as stumbled into, as a kind of insight; the strength to endure, which is not so much a result of trying harder, like Avis, as of owning my own sense of weakness, fearfulness and alienation, because I have felt that kingdom in me and among us which runs deeper still; the sense of inner strength, a being self possessed and rooted in oneself, which is no result of self assertion or being ever and always 'the master of my fate and the captain of my soul,' but is found precisely in the letting go of control, the letting be of my life, the self-acceptance which I call 'being given to myself.'"

Carl Scovel, a Unitarian Universalist minister serving one of our Christian congregations, uses these words, "If there is one message that has given Christians hope, courage, and joy in the face of history and personal pain, it has been the promise, 'You are not alone. In your sickness you are not alone. In your anxiety you are not alone. In your prosperity you are not alone. In your privation you are not alone. In your waking, in your working, in your sleeping, in your dying you are not alone.' That promise, I believe, beyond every creed and dogma (necessary as they are) has been the lifeblood of the Christian church and the breath of life in Christian[s]...for almost twenty centuries of the church's existence."

### **Life gives more than it takes.**

Since our experiences, perspectives, and theological orientations differ, giving advice is a hazardous matter for anyone. But there is more commonality in our approach to loss and grieving than it might seem. One of the essentials of coping with loss is taking ourselves very seriously. Feelings of sorrow or confusion, even anger, are real and must be expressed in order for healing to occur. When we cease trying to push our pain away we discover, little by little, that we can bear it.

Having freed ourselves of the fear that we cannot bear the pain, we discover that others are genuinely reaching out to us. They are not frightened by our grief as perhaps we thought they would be. Suddenly, the larger world begins to open up again and feels more secure than it felt at the moment of our loss.

Far down the road of grieving, we recognize that in the context of a larger reality, which some Unitarian Universalists call God, we still have that which was lost, and much more. This life always gives us far more than it takes away. With this conviction we turn again to the task of living and to those near at hand who need us to live well.

### **Handout 3: Loss: The Litmus Test of a Religious Faith**

Excerpted from *Liberal Religion's Response to Loss*, 1985 Minns Lectures, by John H. Nichols. Reprinted with permission of author.

Some time ago a colleague of mine was interviewing for a new ministry, and the search committee, having read all of his best credentials, had one concern. They said, "You seem to speak a great deal about grief. Now, we are a youngish congregation. We have, perhaps, four to five

funerals a year, and we wonder if you have an interest in the younger members of the congregation. In fact, to be perfectly frank, we wonder if you haven't styled for yourself a geriatric ministry." This perception of the significance of grief is not limited to the young. An older member of my own congregation said to me once, "You speak too much about grief. I want to hear something uplifting on Sunday mornings. Why is it necessary to be so depressing?"

No doubt there are those who, when they saw the announcement of this lecture series, said, "Who would want to listen to, let alone prepare, five lectures on grief?" I understand the apprehension. At a certain point in my ministry it would have occurred to me also that dealing with grief would be one of those crosses a minister had to bear in order to get on to some of the more rewarding aspects of a career. Quite to the contrary, most ministers will say that they feel more in touch with their calling when dealing with grief than at almost any other time. We are not being ghoulish when we say this, but we are recognizing that when we share grieving with our people we are facing the most moving religious issues that a person can confront. If a

religion cannot talk about grief with credibility, then it cannot find credibility on any other subject.

Like many people, the young members of the search committee who perceived grief as a geriatric problem were wrong. Grief is the experience of sadness, which happens after any loss. We don't like to think about our losses, but in our growing up there have been a number of them for each of us. Each loss conditions us, for better or worse, for the next. Our happiness in maturity depends upon the ways in which we have accepted our losses. It depends on how or whether we have grieved along the way.

This seems strange because we are not accustomed to thinking of grief in any way other than that associated with death. Nevertheless, people grieve when they clearly cease to have the protections of childhood. They grieve when they go away from home for the first time. They grieve when they have to give up their first love. They grieve when they suffer a serious illness or injury. They grieve when they leave each stage of life for another. People grieve when they change jobs or homes; when they leave one beloved and comfortable community for another. For a teenager the end of an infatuation or friendship can bring on

a grief as profound and as serious as the grief which may follow the death of a grandparent. If we minimize the grief of the young or the old, or our own grief, for whatever reason it may occur, then we do not contribute to their strengthening and growing or to our own.

Grieving is putting the world back together again. In rational moments we think of the universe as something which exists independently of us. Indeed it does; but how we feel about the universe is determined by how we feel about the people closest to us. As James Carse puts it, "If we are alienated from other existing beings, isolated in the human community, lacking any warmth of personal affection, we are living in a forbidding and largely disordered cosmos. If our lives are, on the other hand, rich in shared intimacy, the cosmos takes the dimensions of a vast home. However, it is also true that in this latter case we are much more vulnerable to the disordering of the basic structures of our lives by the deaths of significant others." (1)

The richer our lives are the more vulnerable we are to loss. Each loss involves a partial disintegrating of the universe in which we live—and at least a challenge to our way of looking at life and the world. For better or worse, we are conditioned to

meet these challenges by the ways in which we were encouraged to adapt to earlier losses in our lives. Grief is not to be belittled. It is the very process by which we grow up either to confront the world in which loss is always possible, meet it on its terms and enjoy it, or to hide from it.

Why should we look at grief? Why should we look at anything else before we can come to understand grief? Grieving is not, as is commonly believed, the weak side of human nature. It is the process by which we strengthen ourselves for the task of living courageously in a universe in which there is very little security even as there is a great deal of happiness and love. Since grieve we inevitably will, if we grieve well we will live well. Grieving is a way of taking one's view of the world—a view which has been shattered by a loss that is deeply felt—and putting that picture back together in a way that more adequately forms a picture of one's present personal universe.

These lectures will seek to look at grief in the Unitarian Universalist context. My view is that we must have an articulate perspective on grief before we can speak sensibly to any other serious personal issue. If we cannot help one another to reorder the universe of meanings that has been

effectively shattered by a serious loss, then we cannot have credibility on any other issue...

[People] may join liberal religious churches for a variety of reasons, but finally they will judge us, and many may already have judged us, upon our willingness and ability to be with them as they travel through the valley of the shadow. Are we a sunshine religion only, or a religion for all of the seasons of human life? By examining the past and the present in a useful context these lectures will attempt to pose an answer to that question.

### **The Study of Loss**

In 1942, on a Saturday evening, the Coconut Grove night club burst into flames, probably as a result of a match which was struck accidentally too close to the lavish decorations. The night club was filled with young...[people] who were celebrating the climax of a Fall weekend and with sailors on leave from the nation's military rearmament. Within a few minutes well over a hundred people died because they were trapped in what rapidly became an inferno. The Coconut Grove fire was a significant landmark in American history for many reasons, but one of these is the subsequent grief work done by Dr. Erich Lindemann, then Chief of Psychiatry at

Massachusetts General Hospital and a professor at Harvard.

Following up on over one hundred relatives of the victims, Lindemann discovered that they all exhibited fairly similar symptoms. These he called the "symptomatology of normal grief." His wording was significant, for prior to this time many psychiatrists regarded grief as an abnormal process—more bluntly, a sickness of the mind. Lindemann pioneered in the study of grief as a normal, and under most circumstances, necessary process of living.

He found several symptoms which were common to most of his patients. Summarized, they were: 1. a marked tendency to give physical expression to the feeling of helplessness, frustration and anger, 2. complaints about lack of strength, fatigue; 3. feelings of depression expressed as emptiness, hollowness. In more serious cases of bereavement, Lindemann found these symptoms: "1. The appearance of hyperactivity, which seems to suggest a denial of the loss and a desire to escape the pain of the loss. 2. The subtle acquisition of medical symptoms which once belonged to the deceased. 3. A serious recognized medical disease, possibly brought on by somatic tension. 4.

A marked alteration in the patient's relationships with friends, involving usually a distancing from that person's friends. 5. Furious, often unexplainable anger against specific persons. 6. A feeling that the patient is going crazy. 7. A serious disruption of the patient's ability to continue his or her old patterns of involvement with other people. 8. The patient may even act in ways which are detrimental to [their] ... own political or economic well-being. 9. The grief reaction takes the form of a straight agitated depression with tension, agitation, insomnia, feelings of worthlessness, bitter self-accusation, and obvious need for punishment." (2)

Commenting on Lindemann's work almost twenty years later, William Rogers said, "Since clergymen are deeply involved with the bereaved, these studies of grief should be of great concern to them. Dr. Lindemann's discoveries have much to say about the funeral and our total relationship to those whose loved ones have died. Many clergyman have seen this, though percentage-wise the number of those who have would seem to be rather small. What apparently has not impressed clergymen is that psychologically the grief caused by the loss of a loved one is quite similar to the loss experiences suffered throughout life. Helping a

child to handle his separation experiences could be meaningful not only in terms of meeting his present psychological needs but in his preparation for the day when someone near and dear to him will die. Grief permeates life, and learning to live with it is a process which should be an essential part of one's development." (3)

Unfortunately, for many years most clergymen and many other helping professionals were unable to see grief as a friend of health. Nor were they impressed with its pervasiveness in all aspects of our lives. Howard Clinebell's *Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling*, a standard textbook for its time (1966), considers the subject of grief under the heading, "Counseling in the Crisis of Bereavement", to which five pages are devoted. (4)

In 1969 Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross published *On Death and Dying* and a new era in the understanding of grief began. What is remarkable about this book is not its conclusions, which are reformulations of Lindemann's findings, but its straightforward, compassionate look at the feelings of dying people and those who surround them. The response of many helping professionals to this work opened the flood gates of research and comment on all aspects of grief.

Having been able to look honestly and unapologetically at the grieving which goes on in many phases of normal lives, theologians and clergy have begun to ask questions about the nature of God in a world where much grieving happens. As a result, two remarkable books have been published fairly recently: Harold Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* and *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs* by Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson. Both books attempt to develop a theology for liberal Christians and Jews based on the existential experience of loss. Pastoral psychology and theology have come a long way in just sixteen years.

### **What Grief Is**

If we are going to understand the Unitarian Universalist approach to grief, we will have to know a little more about what grief is. A simple definition would be, "Grief is the normal but bewildering cluster of ordinary human emotions arising in response to a significant loss, intensified and complicated by the relationship to the person or the object lost. Guilt, shame, loneliness, anxiety, anger, terror, bewilderment, emptiness, profound sadness, despair, helplessness—all are part of grief and all are common to being human. Grief is the clustering

of some or all of these emotions in response to loss." (5)

What follows will be a brief description of some of the emotions which are a part of grief. These emotions must be understood and addressed by clergy and others who seek to assist grieving individuals and so it will be helpful to keep them in mind as we look at what Unitarian Universalists have actually said about loss.

1. *Numbness*: Friends and relatives frequently wonder at the poise of the widow who seemingly sails through the days following her husband's death. She is here and there throughout the community, making funeral arrangements, ordering flowers, consulting her attorney and answering cards and letters. At the reception following the funeral she is gracious and welcoming and shows no signs of fatigue or grief. In a private moment she may say to a friend, "I know this is all going to hit me some time, but right now I really don't feel anything."

One of our survival mechanisms is that we can shield ourselves from the immediate realization of a serious loss. A numbness takes hold of our lives which wears off gradually as we are able to cope with the truth of what has happened. Unfortunately,

this calm before the storm invites the social approval of friends because they are made more comfortable by our apparent stoicism than by our raw feelings. "She's doing so well," many will say and hope that this really is so. Later they will be baffled and hurt when the same widow retreats to the privacy of self-isolation, because only in isolation can she bear the full weight of her sorrow. Few will want to share it with her.

2. *Emptiness, loneliness, and isolation*: "Emptiness is the sense of being diminished from within. Loneliness is its interpersonal counterpart, the sense that one's surroundings are also empty of people who matter or care. Isolation is the sense of being divided from others by invisible, incomprehensible boundaries." (6)

One's sense of self and of the very meaning of life is related to the relationships that each person has with others. When a friend dies, particularly a close friend, particularly a spouse, that sense of self is diminished. It almost feels that something of oneself has been cut away or drained out. C. S. Lewis, in his moving account of grieving over the death of his wife, wrote, "There's one place where her absence comes locally home to me, and it's a place I can't avoid. I mean my own body. It had



such a different importance while it was the body of its lover. Now it's like an empty house." (7)

The loneliness and isolation that people in grief feel is both self-imposed and other imposed. On the one hand, when a universe is shattered by a loss, that person does not feel secure enough to be vulnerable to any but the most understanding friends. But on the other hand, most people find it very frightening to be with someone who is so nakedly helpless before the world. Readily, they will take any signal that the person in grief really wants to be left alone, even when the signals are unintended.

3. *Fear and anxiety*: It is frightening to have your world shattered. We establish our lives on the basis of certain expectations and when there is a significant challenge to those expectations we are faced with the task of putting things back together again in a new way. Can we be the same person; as happy, as confident, as secure when we reconstruct the pieces? There is no good answer to this question in advance of the actual experience of loss, and so we are deeply frightened when the occasion arises.

There are good reasons to be frightened. These may include the loss of a job, the loss of an income

and the loss of secure friendships. In addition, there is again a cultural reason for having this feeling.

There are always going to be those who are frightened by us. Viewing our calamities with perhaps even greater alarm than we do, they think, "There but for the grace of God go I." Their subtle departure from our lives increases our sense of fear.

4. *Guilt and shame*: Against all evidence we privately believe that we can control the workings of fate. Thoughts like, "If only I had done this or that; if only we had had a third consultation, seen the doctor sooner; if only I had been a better person this terrible thing would not have happened. "At this stage of grief even the most rational of people become irrational, believing in a kind of magic. "If only I had done this or that... if only."

The second reason that guilt or shame becomes a part of grief is that we are never the people we would like to be or think we ought to be. At any given time most people can give a detailed summary of the ways in which they failed those they loved. They resolve to do better but, at least in some respects, they never do a lot better. These thoughts come back when a serious loss is suffered.

Finally we must reckon again with the impact of grieving on society. The normal necessary process of grieving takes longer for our friends than we would like it to take, and therefore we convey subtle signals that we are ready for them to give up their grief. These signals frequently are received. Again I quote C. S. Lewis because he is so much to the point. "An odd byproduct of my loss is that I'm aware of being an embarrassment to everyone I meet... Perhaps the bereaved ought to be isolated in special settlements like lepers." (8)

Here is another example: "A psychiatrist working in an institution that served retarded children lost his wife after a long illness. His colleagues avoided him, mumbling condolences that did not add up to a full English sentence. It was a great relief to him when a small retarded boy bluntly said to him, 'Doctor, your wife died.' 'Yes,' responded the psychiatrist. 'That must hurt a lot,' said the boy. The doctor later commented that it was a profound and helpful remark, in contrast to the responses of his psychiatric colleagues. " (9)

5. *Anger*: We don't like being left. We don't like being hurt. When this happens we become angry. As far as we know humankind is the only species of animal that believes in a just universe. "Traumatic

loss upsets our illusion that we live in an orderly world. If we can find someone or something to blame we can continue to avoid the fact that life is uncertain and precarious." (10)

We look for targets and there are many. There is the doctor who did not respond to our calls; the funeral director who charged too much; the minister who spoke too long at mother's funeral; the friends who did not send a card; the lawyer who is delaying the completion of the probate; the insurance company that will not make a settlement. There are infinite targets for anger. But the anger that occurs has little to do with anything anyone actually did. It is anger directed toward the chaos which we feel in our life when a serious loss has shattered our orderly universe.

C. S. Lewis, who has written many books for Christian laypeople, wrote on the death of his wife, "If God's goodness is inconsistent with hurting us, then either God is not good or there is no God: for in the only life we know He hurts us beyond our worst fears and beyond all we can imagine. Step by step we were led by the garden path. Time after time when he seemed most gracious He was really preparing us for the next torture." (11)

6. *Sadness and despair*: We are drained. We feel empty. There is no joy in our life, no energy, no drive, no hope. We can see no future that is happy, no present that is comfortable. We cannot shake this feeling. Even this is upsetting because in the past we have found tricks of the mind to rouse ourselves from the depressions that came along. This is a sadness that does not move, and we almost become convinced that it will be a feature of our lives forever.

We know that our friends have almost given up on us. They discuss our situation in the tones of people who are talking about someone who has contracted a fatal disease. They've tried everything they can think of to cheer us up, but the cloud hangs over our days and over our nights.

7. *Somatization*: Job laments in the midst of his grief that "By night pain pierces my very bones, and there is ceaseless throbbing in my veins (Job 30:17 NEB). When we grieve the loss of something important to us, we grieve with our whole body. We feel the pain literally, physically.

On September 24, 1984, the *New York Times* reported the findings of the National Academy of Sciences that "There is good evidence linking bereavement to a number of adverse health

outcomes in some people." During the year or two following the death of a loved one, cigarette, alcohol and drug consumption are a particular risk. But we already knew that, for many times have we seen the death of a spouse, followed for no particular reason, by the death of the surviving spouse.

The entire process of grieving can have an essentially good outcome. We in the church need to recognize that the messiness of grief has a purpose. Perhaps we have assumed that the purpose of religion is to help people lead successful lives, by which we really mean to handle their pain quickly and expeditiously. When our friends are in profound grief we wonder, Have we failed? Has the church failed? Have they failed?

We in the liberal church may have a particular problem with this. We have been committed to a religion which applies reason and practical judgment to spiritual concerns, but there is nothing rational about the experience of grieving. Nothing, at least, is rational to the person who is recovering from a serious loss. Do we have and have we had the patience, the compassion and the humanity, perhaps most of all the faith in life to stand by while our friends are in the midst of their suffering? Or do

we seek a quick fix, a ready explanation, glib advice or poetic/theological overtones to drown out their suffering or deny it altogether? We shall see.

Before these lectures are over, each person will have the opportunity to arrive at his or her conclusions.

Eugene Kennedy offers this advice for those who are concerned about their friends who grieve.

*There is no substitute for permitting a person to face all of these difficulties directly. They deal with a drastic change in their identity: to exchange one's self concept as a wife for one as a widow cannot be done in an instant. This demands major reorganization of the whole perceptual system; the person literally has to develop a new way of looking at the self. Again, this takes time and the freedom to be weak or depressed in the process. Grieving individuals may be preoccupied with the lost person and with the many memories of the past as they experience a deep loneliness. At the heart of all the range of feelings during grief, the bereaved is trying to come to terms with a major life experience. The concept of work—of needing slowly and*

*thoroughly to process the many aspects of mourning—is appropriate for this struggle to come through on the other side of grief. (12)*

We have looked at what grief is and how it appears to us in our lives, through symptoms of shock, emptiness, fear, guilt, anger, deep sadness and somatization. In subsequent lectures we will examine whether or not these feelings and needs are addressed by our Nineteenth Century Christian forebears, by our early Twentieth Century Humanist leaders and by twenty contemporary Unitarian Universalist ministers. How will we judge them? With our forebears we have a problem, for with a few exceptions, we cannot know what went on in their private thoughts when they confronted the darkest moments of their lives and of the lives of their friends. By perusing a few diaries, letters and biographies, we can know what they hoped they had done or intended to do and this will have to be enough.

Much of their public recognition of grieving took place at funerals or memorial services, and so we will look at that context and its therapeutic value next.

## **The Funeral or Memorial Service**

The funeral is not the solution to grief and it is not the end to grief. The funeral usually occurs at the beginning of the grieving process while the bereaved is still in a state of shock and not feeling the full weight of the loss. It is a rehearsal of the values which the community feels should apply to the particular loss which death is. A funeral is a public statement of the promises and commitments which the community members have made to themselves. It is a reflection of what they feel transcends the trauma of loss and of the consolations they expect to have (eventually) in the event of loss.

There are those in the liberal tradition who have discounted the funeral as a pompous and unnecessary ritual. However, most professionals who work with grief believe that the funeral or memorial service is extremely important. In Paul Irion's words,

*The funeral itself is only one part, sometimes even a small part, in the whole psychological process of meeting bereavement. Yet because of its public nature it is extremely important. It represents the response of the community to the emotional experiences of the*

*mourners. Thus, it cannot be regarded as either irrelevant or contradictory to the psychological process of acceptance, release, expression or assimilation that enable the mourner to endure and overcome the tremendous disorganization of his life that has taken place. (13)*

The funeral or memorial service has several vital functions, and I borrow from Mr. Irion's article.

*To reinforce the reality of death.* A loss has occurred though it feels unreal to those most closely affected. The purpose of the funeral is to bring this reality home in as gentle a way possible.

*To provide a framework of supportive relationships for the mourners.* By facing the loss together and accepting it, a major barrier between the mourners has been eased away. Now, they can be more honest with one another.

*To make possible the acknowledgment and expression of the mourners' feelings.* These feelings are shock, anger, guilt, deep sadness, loneliness and a feeling that the world has been turned upside down. There must be some acknowledgment that these feelings are possible

and reasonable or the funeral has no effective place in the grief process.

*To mark a fitting conclusion to the life of the one who has died.* A person has left us. Who was that person? What did he or she mean to us? We need to begin this kind of talking so that it can continue over the many weeks and months that grief will remain with the mourners.

Finally, the purpose of such a service is *to bring the shared values of the community to bear on this particular loss.* No reasonable person would expect that the consolations which are uttered at the time of such a service will have much effect on those most closely impacted at that time. But such a service is the only time we have to say publicly, in so many words, though death has won this battle it has not won the war.

Funeral and memorial observances in all of their occasional extravagance, complexity, awkwardness, and even expense are vital and necessary ways for a religious tradition to acknowledge that it can deal with the trials of living. They are "worthwhile...in emphasizing that he or she is worth the pain and stress of grieving, which the mourners now acutely feel." (14)

For many mourners who spend the initial days after their loss in shock, the funeral is the first occasion they will have for honest grief. It seems sad then that a number of religious liberals request either no service at all or a "celebration" of the departed person's life with nary a word about loss or grieving. What this may say about our willingness to recognize our losses will be covered very shortly.

### **Conclusion**

We have confronted the reality and the nature of grief. We have looked at its symptoms, and we have examined the feelings that are associated with it. We have recognized that dealing with grief—the utter disorganization of one's personal universe—may be the supreme religious problem. We have looked at one way in which the community deals with grief publicly, the funeral. Now, we are ready to look at some of the ways in which the liberal religious movement has spoken to loss over the many years.

We are known, and we know ourselves to be, a rational, sensible, sunny, upbeat type of religion. We believe we have better, easier solutions to human problems than those proposed by some other religions. But grief does not lend itself easily to this approach. It is understandable but does not

always feel rational. Grieving, and watching people grieve, is a journey into the darkest recesses of the human emotional world. It is a journey to a place we have been reluctant to admit exists. It is a place where despair and emptiness are very real feelings.

Those who would make the journey and return must learn that sometimes there is very little one can do about a bad situation but live through it. Sometimes, explanations are not helpful.

Sometimes we want our religious faith to help us face the darker side of life, admit that it exists and absolve us from any blame for the terror we are experiencing or for our feeling desperate and weak. These are genuine religious needs. Has the liberal religious tradition really met them? This is the question I propose to ask.

## Notes

1. James Carse, "Grief as a Cosmic Crisis," *Acute Grief*, ed. Otto Margolis et al., Columbia University Press, 1981.
2. Erich Lindemann, "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief," reprinted in *Pastoral Psychology*, September 1963, originally written May 1944.
3. William Rogers, "Grief: Erich Lindemann's Contribution to Our Understanding Of It," *Pastoral Care of the Dying and Bereaved*, ed. Robert B. Reeves, Health Sciences Publishing, 1973.
4. Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling*, Abingdon Press, 1966.
5. Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs*, The Westminster Press, 1983, p. 55.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Eugene Kennedy, *On Becoming a Counselor*, Seabury Press, 1977, p. 253.
13. Paul Irion, "The Funeral and the Bereaved," *Acute Grief and the Funeral*, ed. Vanderlyn R. Pine, et al., Charles G. Thomas, 1976, p. 35.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

## Workshop 4: Bereavement

### Introduction

*The dead are not under the earth,*

*They are in the fire dying down,*

*They are in the moaning rock,*

*They are in the crying grass,*

*They are in the forest, they are in the home:*

*The dead are not dead. — Birago Diop,*

*20th century Senegalese poet and*

*storyteller*

In this workshop, participants will explore some emotions, experiences, and perceptions that commonly accompany grief. They reflect on personal experiences of grief and share their stories with one another. Together, participants explore the ways in which the grief and mourning practices of Unitarian Universalists are helpful as well as how they might be better and more supportive. The workshop closes with the creation of a list of ways to cope with grief when one's turn comes.

Send a reminder to participants two or three days ahead of the workshop and include information

about preparation from Workshop 3, Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 4.

### Goals

This workshop will:

- Invite participants to consider grief as a universal human experience as well as their own personal experiences of bereavement
- Engage participants in reflection and discussion of what is and is not helpful and supportive about Unitarian Universalist grief and mourning practices
- Engage participants in reflection and discussion of what is and is not helpful and supportive about grief and mourning practices in our broader culture
- Encourage participants to consider a variety of strategies for coping when one has experienced the death of a loved one.

### Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Explore some emotions and perceptions that a bereaved person might experience
- Consider their personal experiences of grief and mourning



- Reflect on what is and is not helpful about the bereavement practices and expectations of Unitarian Universalist culture and of the broader culture
- Name some strategies that help with coping when one has lost a loved one.

## Workshop-at-a-Glance

Activity	Time
Opening	5 minutes
Activity 1: Grief Associations and Experiences	30 minutes
Activity 2: Journaling	15 minutes
Activity 3: All Our Losses	25 minutes
Activity 4: Grief in Our Time	30 minutes
For Next Time	5 minutes
Closing	10 minutes

## Materials

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED/battery-operated candle

- Our Covenant from Workshop 1
- Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 5
- Handout 2, Ways to Cope with Grief
- Three-ring binders with clear plastic covers, one for each participant who does not already have one
- Three-hole punched paper, both lined and unlined
- Color pencils, markers, pens and pencils
- Meditative music and player
- Optional: Computer or video player, speakers, and screen
- Optional: "[Born on a Sunny Day](#)" (2:07), Grief and Loss, *This Emotional Life*, PBS
- Optional: "[A Special Emotion](#)" (0:58), Grief and Loss, *This Emotional Life*, PBS

## Preparation

- Read the resources listed in Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 4, from Workshop 3.
- Post Our Covenant from Workshop 1.
- Customize and make copies of Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 5 for all participants. Make copies of Handout 2, Ways to Cope with Grief.

- Write the list below on newsprint and title it "Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief" (1969) and set it aside:
  - Denial
  - Anger
  - Bargaining
  - Depression
  - Acceptance
- Review [Accessibility Guidelines for Adult Workshop Presenters](#) and implement as appropriate for your group and space.
- Optional: Test equipment and speakers; queue and preview "Born on a Sunny Day" and "A Special Emotion."

## Opening (5 minutes)

Light the chalice and share these words from Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux:

*Mourning has become unfashionable in the United States. The bereaved are supposed to pull themselves together as quickly as possible and to reweave the torn fabric of life...We do not allow...for the weeks and months during which a loss is realized. [mourning]—a beautiful word that suggests*

*the transmutation of the strange into something that is one's own.*

Call attention to the covenant you have posted and ask participants to reaffirm their willingness to let it guide your time together.

## Activity 1: Grief Associations and Experiences (30 minutes)

Invite participants to brainstorm words that they associate with grief and mourning. If after a little while there is a pause in the brainstorm, wait it out by keeping silence for a minute or two. This may allow space for unspoken ideas to come forth. Allow ten minutes for this part of the activity.

After you have finished brainstorming, invite participants to sit in silence for two minutes and reflect of which of the words listed resonates with their personal experiences. Then invite participants to share their reflections in groups of three as they are willing and comfortable. Allow ten minutes for this part of the activity.

Then invite participants to add more words to the brainstorm list. Lead a large group conversation, asking:

- What common experiences and feelings did your small group share regarding grief and mourning?
- What insights did you gain from the brainstorm and conversation?

## Activity 2: Journaling (15 minutes)

Share “What Personnel Handbooks Never Tell You,” a poem by James A. Autry, first published in 1992:

*They leave a lot out of the personnel handbooks.*

*Dying, for instance.*

*You can find funeral leave*

*but you can't find dying.*

*You can't find what to do*

*when a guy you've worked with since you*

*both were pups*

*looks you in the eye*

*and says something about hope and*

*chemotherapy.*

*No phrases,*

*no triplicate forms,*

*no rating systems.*

*Seminars won't do it*

*and it's too late for a new policy on*

*sabbaticals.*

*They don't tell you about eye contact*

*and how easily it slips away*

*when a woman who lost a breast*

*says, "They didn't get it all."*

*You can find essays on motivation*

*but the business schools*

*don't teach what the good manager says*

*to keep people taking up the slack*

*while someone steals a little more time*

*at the hospital.*

*There's no help from those tapes*

*you pop into the player*

*while you drive or jog.*

*They'd never get the voice right.*

*And this poem won't help either.*

*You just have to figure it out for yourself,*

*and don't ever expect to do it well.*

Another option is to show “Born on a Sunny Day” and “A Special Emotion.”

Call attention to color pencils, markers, pens, and pencils. Invite participants to write or draw, responding individually in their journals to the poem, the video, their personal expressions and experiences of grief, or all three. Play meditative music while they journal.

### **Activity 3: All Our Losses (25 minutes)**

Share this quote from “All Our Losses” by John H. Nichols:

*Since our experiences, perspectives, and theological orientations differ, giving advice is a hazardous matter for anyone. But there is more commonality in our approach to loss and grieving than it might seem. One of the essentials of coping with loss is taking ourselves very seriously. Feelings of sorrow or confusion, even anger, are real and must*

*be expressed in order for healing to occur.*

*When we cease trying to push our pain away we discover, little by little, that we can*

*bear it. Having freed ourselves of the fear*

*that we cannot bear the pain, we discover*

*that others are genuinely reaching out to us.*

*They are not frightened by our grief as*

*perhaps we thought they would be.*

*Suddenly, the larger world begins to open*

*up again and feels more secure than it felt*

*at the moment of our loss.*

*Far down the road of grieving, we recognize*

*that in the context of a larger reality, which*

*some Unitarian Universalists call God, we*

*still have that which was lost, and much*

*more. This life always gives us far more*

*than it takes away. With this conviction we*

*turn again to the task of living and to those*

*near at hand who need us to live well.*

Lead a discussion of the John Nichols reading. Most people will have read the “All Our Losses” pamphlet text, but some may have read the longer piece “Loss: The Litmus Test of a Religious Faith” (Handout 3 from Workshop 3). Invite any who have read the longer piece to

offer one or two points that struck them from their reading.

Lead a discussion using these questions to guide you:

- What Unitarian Universalist messages have you received or heard about grief and mourning? Are they adequate? If not, what messages would be helpful?
- When you have been bereaved, what supports have you received and from where? Have you provided support to others in times of grief? How have you traveled with others through the valley of the shadow of death?
- How can our faith community be helpful in supporting those who are bereaved?

#### **Activity 4: Grief in Our Time (30 minutes)**

Post the newsprint with Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's stages of grief. Introduce a discussion, saying:

*Kübler-Ross's work was very helpful when it was published in 1969. Her work pushed Western culture into a new understanding of grief. Contemporary understanding tells us*

*the stages are not linear. A person may skip a stage or two, may repeat a stage or two, and may get stuck in the process. We know now that these are not really stages but rather recognizable aspects of grieving.*

Invite participants to reflect on both the Kübler-Ross work and the prereading they have done about bereavement. Lead a discussion, using some of these questions to guide you:

- How does the presence or absence of supportive community affect the grief process?
- What is the effect of our culture's emphasis on the individual?
- What is the effect of family health (or dysfunction) when a death in the family occurs?
- How do work policies regarding bereavement time help or hinder our coping?
- Are we impatient with grief? Does the "celebration of life" focus common at Unitarian Universalist memorial services short-circuit or deny grief?
- Are we willing to acknowledge the anger that is often part of the grieving process?

- How do contemporary trends such as delaying funerals, videotaping funerals, and private rites (or none at all) fit with what we know about grief and mourning?
- In what ways are we urged to use pharmaceuticals to medicate and mediate the pain of grief? What other nonpharmaceuticals are used for the same purpose?
- What gender differences are there in how we experience grief and loss?
- How is grief different with an expected death than it is with a sudden or unexpected death? Is the bereavement process for a violent or accidental death different from the process for other kinds of death?
- Can one ever attain closure after losing a loved one?

### **For Next Time (5 minutes)**

Share with participants any updates on upcoming plans. Distribute Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 5. Either distribute copies of Handout 3, Loss: The Litmus Test of a Religious Faith, from Workshop 3, or include a link to the handout in your customization of Handout 1. Ask participants to read the resources listed for next time.

Tell participants that Find Out More includes additional resources they may wish to explore.

### **Closing (10 minutes)**

Distribute Handout 2, Ways to Cope with Grief and ask participants to read it. Invite them to gather in a circle, and, as they are ready, to read one item from the handout that appeals to them or to share their own way to cope with grief.

Share these closing words from Doug Manning, author of *The Grief Journey*:

*Don't let anyone take your grief away from you. You deserve it, and you must have it. If you had a broken leg, no one would criticize you for using crutches until it was healed. If you had major surgery, no one would pressure you to run a marathon next week. Grief is a major wound. It does not heal overnight. You must have time and the crutches until you can heal.*

Extinguish the chalice.

### **Leader Reflection and Planning**

Make time for individual reflection and discussion with your co-leader after the conclusion of the workshop. Consider these questions:

- What worked well in today's workshop?  
How can these elements or approaches be repeated or amplified in the future?
- What was most challenging? What could be done to make these parts easier or more effective?
- At what points were participants most and least engaged?
- Were all voices in the group heard?
- Was the room set up in a way conducive to group functioning?
- Did you have all the resources you needed?
- Did you feel prepared for any pastoral issues that emerged in the course of the workshop? How did you—and the group—respond? Is there anything you would do differently?
- Were your practical and spiritual preparation time adequate?
- Are there opportunities for improvement and modification in advance of the next workshop?

## Handout 1: Looking Ahead to Workshop 5

*The dead are not under the earth,*

*They are in the fire dying down,*

*They are in the moaning rock,*

*They are in the crying grass,*

*They are in the forest, they are in the home:*

*The dead are not dead.* — Birago Diop,  
20th century Senegalese poet and  
storyteller

### For Next Time

To prepare for the next workshop, read:

- Carol Galginaitis, “Loss Across the Lifespan” (p. 11-17) in [Let's Talk About Families and Loss](#), published on the UUA website.
- [Tips for Talking with Children about Death](#), from the UUA Tapestry of Faith program Love Will Guide Us.
- Optional: [Supporting Grieving Preschoolers](#), from the Dougy Center, the National Center for Grieving Children and Families.

- Optional: [Helping Children and Teens Cope with Fear after a Death](#), from the Dougy Center, the National Center for Grieving Children and Families.

### Find Out More

- To read more of John Nichols's thoughts on Unitarian Universalism and death, read *Loss: The Litmus Test of a Religious Faith*, Handout 3 from Workshop 3.
- Review materials on the [Grief and Loss](#) page of PBS's *This Emotional Life*.
- Explore the many [bereavement resources](#) from the U.S. National Library of Medicine.
- Read Mark Belletini, [Nothing Gold Can Stay: The Colors of Grief](#) (Skinner, 2015).

## Handout 2: Ways to Cope with Grief

Here are some ways others have found to cope with grief. What would you add?

1. Create visual art: painting, collages, photography, or fabric art
2. Put quotes on your refrigerator. Example: "I will turn to her as often as possible in gladness. I will even salute her with a laugh. The less I mourn her the nearer I seem to her." C. S. Lewis

3. Read something you have been longing to read.
4. Pray. "If you can't pray as you want to, pray as you can. God knows what you mean." Vance Havner
5. Play, perform, or listen to music.
6. Write. Compose a good-bye or anniversary letter or poem.
7. Pie-chart your feelings. Draw a pie chart to illustrate your current emotions and the relative space they occupy in your emotional and spiritual life. You might include fear, guilt, anger, regret, depression, confusion, and fatigue but also love, gratitude, and relief. Charting emotions helps one visualize and make sense of an emotional quagmire.
8. Meditate using your favorite focus technique, or try something new. Use meditative music, color, smell, or your favorite place as a focus.
9. Watch movies and television that are heartfelt or humorous. Watch something you have been meaning to watch.
10. Try bumper sticker theology: Create the perfect bumper sticker about grief.



11. Exercise. Walk, dance, do yoga, bike, or play a sport. Resist the temptation toward inactivity.

12. Enjoy humor: comics, magazine cartoons, live performances, or a good laugh with family or friends.

13.

14.

15.

# Workshop 5: Children and Death

## Introduction

*I was astonished to hear a highly intelligent boy of ten remark after the sudden death of his father: "I know father's dead, but what I can't understand is why he doesn't come home to supper." — Sigmund Freud, Interpretation of Dreams*

*Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone. — Fred Rogers*

This workshop concerns talking with children about death and grief. Participants reflect on their own childhood experiences of death. They also consider their adult experiences of talking with children about death as a “part of life” concept and as parents or caregivers when children are grieving. The workshop offers guidance about such conversations and invites participants to see the guidance applied in children’s books and a video.

Send a reminder to participants two or three days ahead of the workshop and include information about preparation from Workshop 4, Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 5.

## Goals

This workshop will:

- Examine the challenges of talking with children about death
- Introduce resources to help children become more comfortable talking about death
- Help adults increase skills and comfort in talking about death with children.

## Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Explore their own childhood experiences of death
- Explore their adult experiences of talking about death with children
- Gain knowledge of print, online, and video resources that are helpful in talking about death with children

- Increase skills and comfort in talking about death with children.

## Workshop-at-a-Glance

Activity	Time
Opening	5 minutes
Activity 1: Learning about Death	30 minutes
Activity 2: Death in Children's Books	40 minutes
Activity 3: Children and Grief	20 minutes
Activity 4: Sharing Experiences and Questions	15 minutes
For Next Time	5 minutes
Closing	5 minutes

## Materials

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED/battery-operated candle
- Our Covenant from Workshop 1
- Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 6

- [Let's Talk About Families and Loss](#) by Carol Galginaitis
- Three-ring binders with clear plastic covers, one for each participant who does not already have one
- Three-hole punched paper, both lined and unlined
- Color pencils, markers, pens and pencils
- Several children's books on death, grief, and mourning. Suggestions include:
  - Susan Varley, *Badger's Parting Gifts* (HarperCollins, 1992)
  - Bryan Mellonie, *Lifetimes: A Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children* (Bantam Books, 1983)
  - Joan Singleton Prestine, *Someone Special Died* (Fearon Teacher Aids, 1993)
  - Laurene Krasny Brown, *When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death* (Little, Brown, 1996)
  - Margaret Wise Brown, *The Dead Bird* (Addison-Wesley, 1965)
  - Betsy Hill Williams, Jane Rzepka, Ken Sawyer, and Noreen Kimball,

[About Death: A Unitarian](#)

[Universalist Book for Kids](#) (uu&me!, 2012). Available at the UUA Bookstore.

- Computer or video player, speakers, and screen
- “About Uncle Jack” (1:58), “Expressing Emotions” (2:08), and “You Can Talk to Me” (2:06), [three short videos](#) on the *Sesame Street* website. If you are not able to stream video in your meeting space, purchase the Sesame Street DVD, “When Families Grieve” or borrow it from the public library and prepare to show a segment with suggestions for parents and caregivers (15:06-21:08)

## Preparation

- Read the resources listed in Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 5, from Workshop 4.
- Post Our Covenant from Workshop 1.
- Customize and make copies of Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 6 for all participants.

- Make several copies of pages 11-14 of [Let's Talk About Families and Loss](#).
- Write on newsprint and post:
  - Do you remember when someone first talked to you about death? Was the conversation in response to the death of a particular person? A pet? A wild animal?
  - Do you remember how old you were the first time you experienced a death?
  - Do you remember how you felt?
  - How did others explain the death to you?
- Talk with your religious educator, minister, or public librarian and obtain copies of suitable children’s books on death and dying.
- Arrange books on a table near the chalice.
- Test equipment and speakers; queue and preview the segment (15:06-21:08) of “When Families Grieve.”
- Review [Accessibility Guidelines for Adult Workshop Presenters](#) and implement as appropriate for your group and space.

## Opening (5 minutes)

Light the chalice and share these words from Fred Rogers:

*Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.*

Call attention to the covenant you have posted and ask participants to reaffirm their willingness to let it guide your time together.

### **Activity 1: Learning about Death (30 minutes)**

Invite participants to consider their own experiences with death when they were young. Call attention to the posted questions and invite them to share responses in pairs. Allow ten minutes for the conversation, letting them know when five minutes have elapsed so that they can switch speaker and listener roles. Then lead a large group conversation, asking:

- As an adult, have you ever spoken to a child as an adult about death? How well did that conversation go?
- What would help you be better able to have such a conversation?
- What suggestions in the reading you prepared for this session struck you as most helpful?

Allow 15 minutes for this discussion. Then explain that there are at least two different kinds of conversations about death that they might have with a child. One conversation is about death as a part of life, a conversation that might happen when one comes upon a dead creature in the wild or when they hear about death through a story, a movie, or the death of a friend's grandparent. The other conversation happens when a child is grieving the death of a family member, a friend, or a pet.

### **Activity 2: Death in Children's Books (40 minutes)**

Invite participants to form groups of three. Give each group a copy of pages 11-14 of "Loss across the Lifespan" from Let's Talk About Families and Loss and one of the children's books. Invite the

group to read the book, and then to decide for which age(s) the book is most appropriate and how it exemplifies the guidance given in “Loss across the Lifespan.” Allow about 20 minutes for the group to work with the book. Then invite each group to share a bit about the book and how it might be helpful in talking with children about death.

### **Activity 3: Children and Grief (20 minutes)**

Show “About Uncle Jack,” “Expressing Emotions,” and “You Can Talk to Me,” three Sesame Street segments that explore helping children cope with grief. If you are unable to stream the segments, explain that you are going to show a segment of an hour-long PBS video called “When Families Grieve.” The video follows four real-life families in which a parent has died, and *Sesame Street*’s Elmo, whose uncle Jack has died. Show a clip that focuses on how parents and caregivers can help grieving children. Show 15:06-21:08 of the video.

Then call attention to color pencils, markers, pens, and pencils. Invite participants to consider their own experiences of grief as a child and experiences they have had with grieving children, and to write or draw in their journals as they feel moved.

### **Activity 4: Sharing Experiences and Questions (15 minutes)**

Go around the circle and invite participants to share their journal reflections and their questions and concerns with the large group as they are comfortable doing so. Ask other participants to refrain from responding until all have shared. If time remains after each person has shared, invite further reflections and questions.

### **For Next Time (5 minutes)**

Share with participants any updates on upcoming plans. Distribute Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 6.

Tell participants that Find Out More includes additional resources they may wish to explore.

### **Closing (5 minutes)**

Explain that the closing words come from a children’s book about an interfaith family, *Kaddish for Grampa in Jesus’ Name Amen*, by James Howe and Catherine Stock (Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2004). Share these words:

*And then one night, after the people had stopped coming and the candle was no*

*longer burning, Daddy was putting me to bed when his fingers felt something under my pillow.*

*“What’s this?” he asked.*

*I pulled it out to show him. It was the case for Grampa’s glasses. “Grandma gave it to me,” I told him. “She said I was always the best one at helping Grampa find his glasses. I touch it every night before I go to sleep.”*

*“To remember Grampa,” Daddy said in a soft voice.*

*I nodded, and Daddy kissed me on the forehead.*

*After Daddy left the room, I touched Grampa’s glasses case to my heart. I closed my eyes and pictured his wrinkled face. I could almost hear him singing to me.*

*“Good night, Grampa,” I said.*

*And then I slid the glasses case under my pillow and kept my hand on it while I fell asleep.*

*It wasn’t the Christian way and it wasn’t the Jewish way. It was just my way. It was my Kaddish for Grampa in Jesus’ name amen.*

Extinguish the chalice.

## **Leader Reflection and Planning**

Make a time for individual reflection and discussion with your co-leader after the conclusion of the workshop. Consider these questions:

- What worked well in today’s workshop?  
How can these elements or approaches be repeated or amplified in the future?
- What was most challenging? What could be done to make these parts easier or more effective?
- At what points were participants most and least engaged?
- Were all voices in the group heard?
- Was the room set up in a way conducive to group functioning?
- Did you have all the resources you needed?
- Did you feel prepared for any pastoral issues that emerged in the course of the workshop? How did you—and the group—

respond? Is there anything you would do differently?

- Were your practical and spiritual preparation time adequate?
- Are there opportunities for improvement and modification in advance of the next workshop?

## Handout 1: Looking Ahead to

### Workshop 6

*I was astonished to hear a highly intelligent boy of ten remark after the sudden death of his father: "I know father's dead, but what I can't understand is why he doesn't come home to supper." — Sigmund Freud, Interpretation of Dreams*

*Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone. — Fred Rogers*

### For Next Time

To prepare for the next workshop, read or watch:

- [Suicide Prevention, Myths and Facts](#), Crisis Services, Buffalo, NY.
- [Suicide Fact Sheet](#), National Alliance on Mental Illness.
- [The Right to Die with Dignity](#), UUA General Resolution, 1988.
- [A Mother's "Joyous Goodbye," Compassion and Choices](#).
- [Optional: "The Suicide Plan," Frontline, PBS, November 13, 2012.](#)

### Find Out More

- Explore the many [bereavement resources](#) from the U.S. National Library of Medicine, [including specific resources for parents of children and teens](#).
- [The Dougy Center](#), the National Center for Grieving Children and Families, has web-based resources for children and teens as well as their parents.
- Watch "When Families Grieve," featuring the *Sesame Street* Muppets, PBS, 2010, available at public libraries. [A guide for](#)



[parents and caregivers](#) is also available online.

## Workshop 6: Suicide and The Right To Die

### Introduction

*We cannot tear out a single page of our life,  
but we can throw the whole book in the fire.*  
— George Sand, 19th century French  
novelist

This workshop focuses on two related topics, both emotionally charged, but in different ways. Suicide and suicide prevention is one topic. The right of terminally ill people to die in the manner and time of their own choosing is the other. Through videos, print resources, journaling, paired sharing, and large group discussion, participants explore their own experiences and feelings and share them with others as they are comfortable. Together participants connect the issues to their Unitarian Universalist faith, asking:

- What can our congregation do to help with suicide prevention?

- Does my Unitarian Universalist faith call me to support the right of self-determination in dying?

Send a reminder to participants two or three days ahead of the workshop and include information about preparation from Workshop 5, Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 6.

### Goals

This workshop will:

- Explore suicide myths, facts, perceptions, and assumptions
- Offer information about resources and strategies to help prevent suicide
- Provide a process for examining the ethical questions concerning the right to die with dignity
- Raise awareness of the 1988 UUA Resolution The Right to Die with Dignity and invite discussion of its validity today.

### Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Explore myths and facts about suicide

- Discuss some perceptions, judgments, and assumptions commonly made about suicide
- Learn about some resources and strategies to help prevent suicide or cope with grief after a loved one has committed suicide
- Consider ways in which their congregation can help prevent suicide
- Explore “the right to die with dignity” suicide by persons with a debilitating terminal illness
- Consider their own feelings and experiences regarding assisted suicide
- Reflect on the 1988 UUA Resolution The Right to Die with Dignity.

Die with Dignity Resolution	
For Next Time	5 minutes
Closing	5 minutes

## Materials

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED/battery-operated candle
- Our Covenant from Workshop 1
- Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 7
- [Suicide Prevention, Myths and Facts](#), Crisis Services, Buffalo, NY, and [Suicide Fact Sheet](#), National Alliance on Mental Illness
- Three-ring binders with clear plastic covers, one for each participant who does not already have one
- Three-hole punched paper, both lined and unlined
- Color pencils, markers, pens and pencils
- Computer or video player, speakers, and screen
- Segment of "[The Suicide Plan](#)" (15:06-21:08), *Frontline*, PBS,. Video may be streamed from the PBS website. It may also

## Workshop-at-a-Glance

Activity	Time
Opening	5 minutes
Activity 1: Myths and Facts about Suicide	30 minutes
Activity 2: Suicide Prevention	20 minutes
Activity 3: Right to Die	40 minutes
Activity 4: UUA Right to	15 minutes

be purchased or borrowed from a public library.

- [Teen Suicide Prevention](#) (3:47), Mayo Clinic video, or [Suicide Warning Signs](#), the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

## Preparation

- Read materials listed in Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 6, from Workshop 5.
- Post Our Covenant from Workshop 1.
- Customize and make copies of Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 7 for all participants.
- Make copies of [Suicide Prevention, Myths and Facts](#) and [Suicide Fact Sheet](#).
- [Make copies of The Right to Die with Dignity](#), 1988 UUA General Resolution, or prepare to project it.
- [Obtain a copy of "The Suicide Plan" or make plans to stream it from the PBS website.](#)
- Test equipment and speakers; queue and preview [Teen Suicide Prevention](#) or print and make copies of [Suicide Warning Signs](#).
- Queue and preview the segment (15:06-21:08) of "[The Suicide Plan](#)."

- Review [Accessibility Guidelines for Adult Workshop Presenters](#) and implement as appropriate for your group and space.

## Opening (5 minutes)

Light the chalice and share these words from Kate Walker:

*We open our hearts to love,*

*yet sometimes find pain.*

*We open our hearts to connection,*

*yet sometimes find loss.*

*We yearn for simplicity,*

*yet sometimes find complexity.*

*Our hearts heal, find connection*

*and we embrace life in all its simplicity*

*and its complexity,*

*with love, with trust and compassion.*

Call attention to the covenant you have posted and ask participants to reaffirm their willingness to let it guide your time together.

Explain that in this workshop you are going to talk about two related topics, both emotionally charged

but in different ways. Suicide and suicide prevention is one topic. The right of terminally ill people to die in the manner and time of their own choosing is the other. Urge participants to take care of themselves emotionally, especially if they have had experiences that make these topics deeply personal. Assure them that they should share only as they feel comfortable.

### **Activity 1: Myths and Facts about Suicide (30 minutes)**

Distribute copies of Suicide Prevention, Myths and Facts and Suicide Fact Sheet, which participants were asked to read before the workshop. Invite them to share things they found surprising from the list and things that verify their own experiences. Be comfortable with silences in this part of the activity; it may take some time for people to gather their thoughts to respond. Allow ten minutes for this discussion.

Then brainstorm a list of common perceptions and generalizations about suicide of a person who is not terminally ill. Tell them that they need not personally believe something to list it as a common perception. You can get the brainstorm started by adding one or two of these perceptions:

- Suicide is a sin. It breaks the bonds between a person and God, and with family and community.
- Suicide is not natural; it breaks the natural cycle of life and death.
- Suicide demonstrates weakness and failure to cope.
- Suicide is an escape from a personal battle.
- Suicide is a way of getting back after being rejected or hurt.
- Suicide demonstrates a failure of systems of intervention and support.

Then invite participants to examine each of the statements. Engage participants in discussion, asking:

- When have you heard friends, acquaintances, or the media make these or similar statements?
- Are such statements helpful? Why or why not?

Share this advice from the website of [The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](http://www.americanfoundationforsuicideprevention.org) for those who are grieving a death due to suicide:

*An underlying mental disorder alone is not usually enough. Most people who kill*

*themselves experienced a combination of deep psychological pain, desperate hopelessness, and challenging life events.*

*We know that suicide is the tragic outcome of a serious underlying illness combined with a complicated mix of individual circumstances. It is not a sign of moral weakness. It does not reveal a character flaw. It is not a sign of irresponsibility, or a hostile act. It should not be a source of shame. Reading this paragraph over and over again until it sinks in can help you to make sense of the suicide loss and begin your healing journey.*

## **Activity 2: Suicide Prevention (20 minutes)**

Show the video *Teen Suicide Prevention* or distribute copies of *Suicide Warning Signs*. Invite comments and observations. Ask how the information in the video or handout is applicable to people of all ages.

Then lead a conversation about what your congregation might do to help in suicide prevention.

Keep track of suggestions on newsprint. If

necessary, here are some suggestions that can help get the conversation started:

- Prominently post suicide prevention hotline phone numbers.
- Invite an expert to speak with youth and parents.

## **Activity 3: Right to Die (40 minutes)**

Show Segment of "[The Suicide Plan](#)" (15:06-21:08), *Frontline*, PBS.

Then call attention to color pencils, markers, pens, and pencils. Invite participants to consider their own experiences and feelings about suicide in the event of debilitating terminal illness and to reflect, write, or draw in their journals. Allow ten minutes for this part of the activity.

Invite participants to form pairs and to share their reflections and experiences as they are comfortable. Allow ten minutes for this part of the activity.

Then regather the large group noting that assisted suicide is a controversial issue in our time. Lead a discussion asking:

- What are some reasons to support the right to die?

- What are some risks of legalizing assisted suicide?

#### **Activity 4: UUA Right to Die with Dignity Resolution (15 minutes)**

Distribute copies of [The Right to Die with Dignity](#), 1988 UUA General Resolution, or project it. Go around the circle and ask participants to read aloud one section at a time, noting that it is fine to pass.

After you have read the resolution, ask:

- What has changed since 1988—in medicine or ethics or in the political and legal landscape?
- Does this resolution represent your own point of view—or would you change it in some way?
- Does your Unitarian Universalist faith call you to support the right of self-determination in dying? Is this support unequivocal? If not, what are the conditions or limitations you would put on that right?

#### **For Next Time (5 minutes)**

Share with participants any updates on upcoming plans. Distribute Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 7 and answer any questions.

Tell participants that Find Out More includes additional resources they may wish to explore.

#### **Closing (5 minutes)**

Share these closing words from Lee Ann Wester:

*Is there such a thing as a good death?*

*Perhaps we should ask is there such a thing as a good life?*

*To live a good life with*

*Love,*

*Honesty,*

*Kindness,*

*Humor,*

*Compassion.*

*Couldn't a good death contain these qualities, too?*

*In this great circle,*

*To come all the way around*

*And face death as we did life. To die a good death with*

*Love,*

*Honesty,*

*Kindness,*

*Humor*

*Compassion.*

*To leave this world*

*With a smile on our face*

*And peace in our heart.*

*Blessed be. Amen.*

Extinguish the chalice.

## **Leader Reflection and Planning**

Make a time for individual reflection and discussion with your co-leader after the conclusion of the workshop. Consider these questions:

- What worked well in today's workshop?  
How can these elements or approaches be repeated or amplified in the future?
- What was most challenging? What could be done to make these parts easier or more effective?
- At what points were participants most and least engaged?
- Were all voices in the group heard?

- Was the room set up in a way conducive to group functioning?
- Did you have all the resources you needed?
- Did you feel prepared for any pastoral issues that emerged in the course of the workshop? How did you—and the group—respond? Is there anything you would do differently?
- Were your practical and spiritual preparation time adequate?
- Are there opportunities for improvement and modification in advance of the next workshop?

## **Handout 1: Looking Ahead to**

### **Workshop 7**

*We cannot tear out a single page of our life,  
but we can throw the whole book in the fire.*

— *George Sand, 19th century French  
novelist*

### **Field Trip Information**

Here are details for our upcoming field trip(s):

[Insert your information here. For suggestions about the field trip(s), see the program introduction.]

### For Next Time

To prepare for the next workshop:

- Write a draft of your own obituary.
- Consider: At this moment, what epitaph do you want on your tombstone? If you don't want a tombstone, where would you like your remains to be?

### Looking Ahead

In Workshop 7: Preparation for Death [insert date here], a visitor will talk to us about palliative care and hospice care to explain some common end-of-life medical choices and advance directives. [Insert information about your visitor].

For Workshop 8: Sharing New Insights [insert date here], you are invited to share an artistic response to death and dying, such as a photograph, drawing, painting, poem, prose, song, music, ceramics, or dance. The creation of the project and nonjudgmental sharing with the group will yield delightful surprises and provide a way to bring together and express our emotional and spiritual learning from this program.

### Find Out More

- The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention provides a number of [Education and Prevention Programs](#) and resources.
- The United States Veterans Administration provides [Suicide Prevention](#) resources and help for military veterans.
- The [It Gets Better Project](#) offers thousands of video stories to help lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth and young adults find hope.
- The [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) offers immediate help for those who are contemplating suicide.
- [Compassion and Choices](#) is a right-to-die advocacy group that also offers information and counseling for terminally ill people who want to end their lives.
- "[The Suicide Plan](#)," *Frontline*, PBS, [November 13, 2012, examines the right-to-die movement.](#)



# Workshop 7: Preparation for

## Death

### Introduction

*The dying must often feel this way—  
steaming along just fine, while on ahead  
someone has torn up the rails. — Annie  
Dillard*

This workshop concerns end of life. Participants will learn about and reflect on medical issues and choices as well as consider how they wish to be remembered.

Several weeks before the workshop, invite a medical professional with experience in end-of-life medicine, palliative care, and hospice care to join you for the first half hour and explain some common end-of-life medical choices. If you choose to give Five Wishes booklets to participants, order them well in advance at the [Aging with Dignity](#) website.

Make sure you have details pinned down for the field trip to a funeral home, cemetery, or crematorium and be prepared to answer any questions about the trip.

Send a reminder to participants two or three days ahead of the workshop and include information about the field trip and about preparation from Workshop 6, Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 7.

### Goals

This workshop will:

- Provide information about end-of-life medical choices and offer a process for participants to reflect on personal choices
- Invite reflection and conversation about how participants wish to be remembered and memorialized.

### Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Gain knowledge of end-of-life medical choices and issues
- Begin to create a living will or advance directives and decide how to share their wishes with medical professionals and loved ones
- Share their draft obituaries and epitaphs

- Consider how they wish to be memorialized at the time of death.

## Workshop-at-a-Glance

Activity	Time
Opening	5 minutes
Activity 1: Medical Choices at End of Life	30 minutes
Activity 2: What Matters in the End	20 minutes
Activity 3: Five Wishes or Advance Directives	20 minutes
Activity 4: Obituaries and Epitaphs	30 minutes
For Next Time	10 minutes
Closing	5 minutes

## Materials

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED/battery-operated candle
- Our Covenant from Workshop 1
- Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 8

- [Five Wishes booklet](#) for each participant or copies of [your state's advance directives](#) or both
- Three-ring binders with clear plastic covers, one for each participant who does not already have one
- Three-hole punched paper, both lined and unlined
- Computer or video player, speakers, and screen
- Segment of "[Being Mortal](#)" (17:13-23:36), *Frontline*, PBS. Video may be shown from the PBS website. It may also be purchased or borrowed from a public library.

## Preparation

- Invite a medical professional with experience in end-of-life medicine, palliative care, and hospice care to explain some common end-of-life medical choices.
- Read resources listed in Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 7, from Workshop 6.
- Post Our Covenant from Workshop 1.

- Customize and make copies of Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 8 for all participants.
- Download [your state's advance directives](#) from the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization website and make copies.
- Obtain copies of the [Five Wishes booklet](#) for all participants. Order them (at a small cost) from the Aging with Dignity website.
- Obtain a copy of "[Being Mortal](#)" or make plans to stream it from the PBS website.
- Test equipment and speakers; queue and preview the segment (17:13-23:36) of "[Being Mortal](#)."
- Review [Accessibility Guidelines for Adult Workshop Presenters](#) and implement as appropriate for your group and space.

## Opening (5 minutes)

Light the chalice and share these words from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, 20 (NRSV):

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:*

*a time to be born, and a time to die;*

*a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;*

*a time to kill, and a time to heal;*

*a time to break down, and a time to build up;*

*a time to weep, and a time to laugh;*

*a time to mourn, and a time to dance;*

*a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;*

*a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;*

*a time to seek, and a time to lose;*

*a time to keep, and a time to throw away;*

*a time to tear, and a time to sew;*

*a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;*

*a time to love, and a time to hate;*

*a time for war, and a time for peace...*

*All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.*

Call attention to the covenant you have posted and ask participants to reaffirm their willingness to let it guide your time together.

Explain that in this workshop they are going to talk about decision making for the end of life. Urge them to take care of themselves as they work through what can be emotionally challenging territory.

### **Activity 1: Medical Choices at End of Life (30 minutes)**

Welcome the medical professional you have invited, and ask them to explain end-of-life medical interventions, palliative care, hospice care, and choices that a person or family might have to make. Allow time for participants to ask questions.

### **Activity 2: What Matters in the End (20 minutes)**

Show the segment from "Being Mortal" (17:13-23:36). Ask participants to reflect on any experiences with end-of-life decisions for a loved one.

Then call attention to color pencils, markers, pens, and pencils. Invite participants to consider what mattered in the end to their loved one, or what will matter in the end to them personally, and to explore

their reflections by writing or drawing in their journals.

### **Activity 3: Five Wishes or Advance Directives (20 minutes)**

Distribute copies of [Five Wishes](#) booklets or your state's advance directives or both. Invite participants to look at the booklet or document and begin to fill it out. Assure them that they may not yet be clear on what they want to include in the document and that they can finish completing it at home. Allow 15 minutes for this part of the activity.

Then ask participants to make a list in their journals of people who should know what this document says and where it will be kept. Medical professionals and loved ones should be on the list. Tell them that if they need help in initiating conversations about end-of-life issues, it can be found on the website called the [Conversation Project](#).

### **Activity 4: Obituaries and Epitaphs (30 minutes)**

Invite participants to form groups of three and, as they are comfortable doing so, to share the obituaries and epitaphs they have written prior to

the workshop. Allow 15 minutes for this part of the activity.

Then regather the large group and engage participants in a conversation about their choices for how they want to be memorialized after death.

Use these questions:

- Who would you like to plan your memorial service or funeral? Family members or yourself? What are advantages and disadvantages of each?
- Do you have a preference for what happens with your remains?

### **For Next Time (10 minutes)**

Share with participants details about your field trip to a funeral home, a cemetery, or a crematorium. Distribute Handout 1, Looking Ahead to Workshop 8 and remind them about the artistic expression for next time. Tell them that they will not be sharing their advance directives or Five Wishes booklets with the group.

### **Closing (5 minutes)**

Share these closing words from Lee Ann Wester:

*When the time comes,*

*we prepare,*

*as if for a party with close friends for care,*

*or a class, ready to learn.*

*But is preparation really possible?*

*Can we ever really prepare,*

*for death?*

*For life?*

*The friends will come for care,*

*the class will happen,*

*we learn.*

*When the time comes.*

Extinguish the chalice.

### **Leader Reflection and Planning**

Make a time for individual reflection and discussion with your co-leader after the conclusion of the workshop. Consider these questions:

- What worked well in today's workshop?  
How can these elements or approaches be repeated or amplified in the future?
- What was most challenging? What could be done to make these parts easier or more effective?

- At what points were participants most and least engaged?
- Were all voices in the group heard?
- Was the room set up in a way conducive to group functioning?
- Did you have all the resources you needed?
- Did you feel prepared for any pastoral issues that emerged in the course of the workshop? How did you—and the group—respond? Is there anything you would do differently?
- Were your practical and spiritual preparation time adequate?
- Are there opportunities for improvement and modification in advance of the next workshop?

## Handout 1: Looking Ahead to Workshop 8

*The dying must often feel this way—  
steaming along just fine, while on ahead  
someone has torn up the rails. — Annie  
Dillard*

### For Next Time

To prepare for the next workshop:

- Fill in advance directive forms or [Five Wishes](#) booklets. Make a plan for sharing them with medical people and loved ones.
- Make a list in your journal of end-of-life decisions that need to be made and discuss that list with loved ones. Here are possible questions:
  - Do I want to preplan my funeral? (If yes, speaking with their minister is recommended.)
  - What do I wish to be done with my body or remains?
  - What financial and legal decisions need to be made, and whose help do I need in making them?
  - What do I want to happen with precious personal possessions?
- Complete your artistic response to death and dying, such as a photograph, drawing, painting, poem, prose, song, music, ceramics, or dance.

### Find Out More

- Download the [Conversation Starter Kit](#) from [the Conversation Project](#) for help in talking with loved ones about end-of-life issues.

- Watch "[Being Mortal](#)," *Frontline*, PBS. In the video, surgeon Atul Gawande examines the relationships doctors have with patients nearing the end of life.
- Read Atul Gawande, [Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End](#) (Metropolitan Books, 2014), which argues for a revisioning of end-of-life conversations and decisions.

## Workshop 8: Sharing New

### Insights

#### Introduction

*And so*

*I shall go, in time, as all*

*Go*

*and greet*

*this sustaining*

*earth*

*with gratitude*

*and pray I*

*am worthy*

*and have served*

*Her well. — Melitta Haslund, from “A*

*Shovel Full of Earth”*

This workshop invites participants to reflect on what they have learned and experienced through Facing Death with Life and to share their creative expressions about death and dying with one another.

Send a note to participants several days ahead of the workshop and remind them to bring their creative expression about death and dying—a photograph, drawing, painting, poem, prose, song, music, ceramic piece, dance, or some other creative work. Assure them that the creative expression is an important part of integrating all that they have experienced, learned, and talked about and that the group will be a welcoming and safe space for the presentation.

#### Goals

This workshop will:

- Provide a process for participants to reflect on what they have learned and experienced in the course of the program and to integrate their learnings with their life.

#### Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Discuss their field trip to the funeral home, cemetery, or crematorium
- Share their creative expressions about death and dying
- Reflect on the meaning of a good death



- Evaluate the program and its effect on their own spiritual growth.

- Computer or video player, speakers, and screen

## Workshop-at-a-Glance

Activity	Time
Opening	5 minutes
Activity 1: Field Trip Reflections	35 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing Creative Expressions and Process	45 minutes
Activity 3: A Good Death?	15 minutes
Activity 4: Evaluation	10 minutes
Closing	10 minutes

## Materials

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED/battery-operated candle
- Candle, lighter, and holder or LED/battery-operated candle for each participant
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Our Covenant from Workshop 1
- Handout 1, Evaluation
- Handout 2, Final Thoughts

## Preparation

- Post Our Covenant from Workshop 1.
- Customize and make copies of Handouts 1 and 2 for all participants.
- Write on newsprint and post:
  - What were your impressions?
  - What was expected? What was unexpected?
  - Did your views on death change, and if so, how?
  - Did the visit affect your personal plans for your own death?
- Set out candles for closing.
- Review [Accessibility Guidelines for Adult Workshop Presenters](#) and implement as appropriate for your group and space.
- Optional: Arrange for display of creative expressions in your congregation's building.

## Opening (5 minutes)

Light the chalice and share these words from Rev.

Kate Walker:

*With courage we turn to look,*

*with fear and love pulling us forward,*

*death will greet us one day.*

*We look,*

*but we do not welcome,*

*not this time,*

*not next time,*

*we only look,*

*with courage.*

Call attention to the covenant you have posted and ask participants to reaffirm their willingness to let it guide your time together. Assure participants that, together, the group will offer a welcoming and safe space for sharing their creative expressions.

### **Activity 1: Field Trip Reflections (35 minutes)**

Invite participants to share insights, comments, and observations from your field trip to the funeral home, cemetery, or crematorium and record them on newsprint. If the group includes participants who did not make the field trip, invite others to fill in details. Call attention to the questions you have posted and lead a discussion, inviting participants to respond.

### **Activity 2: Sharing Creative Expressions and Process (45 minutes)**

Invite participants, one at a time, to share their creative expressions and the process that led to the work they are sharing. Ask participants to give each other the gift of attentive listening during each presentation. Lead the group in affirming each person after they have shared.

If you have arranged to display their creative expressions in the congregation's building, ask permission of each person before displaying.

### **Activity 3: A Good Death? (15 minutes)**

Ask, "Is there such a thing as a good death?" Invite a discussion, encouraging participants to share any experiences and learnings from the workshop program that have influenced their response to the question.

### **Activity 4: Evaluation (10 minutes)**

Distribute Handout 1, Evaluation and invite participants to complete it and turn it in.

### **Closing (10 minutes)**

Invite each participant to light a candle and name the fear about death and dying they would like to let go.

Share these closing words from Rumi, a 13th-century Persian poet:

*What do you really possess,*

*And what have you gained in this life?*

*What pearls have you brought up*

*From the depths of the sea?*

*On the day of death,*

*Your physical senses will vanish.*

*Do you have the spiritual light*

*To illuminate your heart?*

*When dust fills your eyes in the grave,*

*Will your grave shine brightly?*

Extinguish the chalice.

## Leader Reflection and Planning

Make a time for individual reflection and discussion with your co-leader after the conclusion of the workshop. Consider these questions:

- What worked well in today's workshop?
- What was most challenging?
- At what points were participants most and least engaged?
- Were all voices in the group heard?
- Was the room set up in a way conducive to group functioning?
- Did you have all the resources you needed?
- Did you feel prepared for any pastoral issues that emerged in the course of the workshop? How did you—and the group—respond? Is there anything you would do differently?
- Were your practical and spiritual preparation time adequate?

## **Handout 1: Evaluation**

### **Facing Death with Life**

What did you like the best about the program?

What would you change or improve?

What readings or videos offered you new insights? Did you share any of them with other people?

Is there something we didn't cover that you would have liked to cover?

What was most helpful about the field trip to the funeral home, cemetery, or crematorium? What would have made it better?

What was most helpful about the visit from the health-care professional? What would have made it better?

Did this program make a difference in your views and feelings about death and dying? In what way?

Comments?

Name (Optional):

## Handout 2: Final Thoughts

### *A Shovel Full of Earth*

Melitta Haslund, in “A Shovel Full of Earth.”

Published in *For All That Is Our Life*, edited by Helen and Eugene Pickett (Skinner House, 2005). Used with permission.

*A few shovel fulls*

*of earth*

*await humbly.*

*Dark brown as only*

*earth can be—*

*dug from the fragrant depths.*

*How shall we live*

*This life?*

*And isn't it grander*

*than this in the end?*

*No—the splendor*

*is right here,*

*in the dirt,*

*in the soil*

*that can grow*

*all we need*

*miraculously*

*and without fanfare.*

*With or without us,*

*it nourishes life*

*verdantly.*

*And so*

*I shall go, in time, as all*

*go*

*and greet*

*this sustaining*

*earth*

*with gratitude*

*and pray I*

*am worthy*

*and have served*

*Her well.*

## Find Out More

These resources were also recommended in earlier workshops:

- Download the [Conversation Starter Kit](#) from the Conversation Project for help in talking with loved ones about end-of-life issues.
- [Six Feet Under](#), HBO dramatic comedy series created and produced by Alan Ball. It

features a California family who own and operate a funeral home. Many public libraries have the DVDs.

- [Love and Death: My Journey through the Valley of the Shadow](#) was the last book written by Unitarian Universalist minister Forrest Church (Beacon, 2009).