

Beyond the Partisan Divide

Facilitator Guide: 90-Minute Session

This session offers a set of exercises for a group or an individual to use as preparation for watching the Beyond Partisan Divide video clips. The [video clips](#) are posted online along with a [facilitator guide](#) for a two-hour viewing and discussion session.

Exercise 1, Sister Simone Campbell, Ware Lecture, requires a computer with Internet access and a monitor to display a video clip. During Exercise 6, What's Next? you may wish to go online to explore components of the [Beyond the Partisan Divide Toolkit](#). Alternately, print the [Call to Action](#) for participants, along with other resources you'll find on the landing page.

Session Overview

Activity	Time
Welcome, Introductions, and Covenant	15 min.
Exercise 1: Sister Simone Campbell, Ware Lecture (video clip)	10 min.
Exercise 2: Similarities and Differences	15 min.
Exercise 3: Reading	5 min.
Exercise 4: An Exercise in Assumptions	15 min.
Exercise 5: Continuums	15 min.
Exercise 6: What's Next?	10 min.
Closing and Check-out	5 min.
	Total: 90 min.

Welcome, Introductions, and Covenant (15 minutes)

Ask participants to briefly introduce themselves and answer the question "What brought you to this workshop?"

Read aloud the statement by Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael that explains the purpose of the "Beyond Partisan Division" initiative:

Unitarian Universalism is a border-crossing faith, constantly revisiting what it means to be open and welcoming to all who would find sustenance in our message and our communities. Our first Principle calls us to see the inherent worth and dignity in every person. Our fourth Principle champions a free search for truth and meaning. Still, we struggle to evidence the capacity for a welcome that stretches beyond partisan division. The seemingly intractable division between our nation's political parties and the increasing focus on extreme positions make the call to build beloved community, beyond partisan division, seem at best, difficult, and at worst, ridiculous, even dangerous.

This resource affirms the Unitarian Universalist commitment to live into our principles, in the hope that meeting the challenge will serve us as individuals as it serves the larger life of which we are a part.

If we cannot transcend partisan division in our democratic, free-faith congregations—places where every voice and vision is given space to rise and be counted—where can we? This resource affirms the ideal that building beloved community in our congregation is a learning experience that supports the development of the beloved community beyond our walls. In addition, this resource affirms our commitment to the work of justice, and aims to help us strive for justice in ways that transcend division, and unite us in a commitment to shared values.

Speaking personally, I, and all the others whose contributions imbue this work with meaning, bring you these resources, not to dwell on the tedious and tenuous issues that divide us into partisan camps, but to announce our wholehearted faith that Unitarian Universalism can be much, much more than it is today. We bring you these resources because we are sick and tired of the ideology that has crept into our national landscape, and at times our congregational fold, and stolen us, body and soul, one from another. We bring you these resources because the authority that lays claim to the whole of our identity, the authority that crams the whole of our beauty into the confines of a single label—is an unholy authority which we are called to overthrow. We bring you this resource because we love you and we love Unitarian Universalism.

Invite the group to covenant. Offer this sample and ask for any additions:

- Be quick to hear and slow to speak
- Respect the privacy of those who confide Speak your truth in love
- Call others, and be willing to be called, back into covenant.

Invite participants to literally “shake it out” (this will be repeated a few times during the workshop). Say:

This material can be challenging. Shake out your fear and your expectations... let's shake it out!

Exercise 1: Sister Simone Campbell, Ware Lecture (10 minutes)

Say:

The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) President, in consultation with the General Assembly Planning Committee, invites a distinguished guest each year to address the General Assembly as the Ware Lecturer. In 2014, Sister Simone Campbell spoke.

Play the video from 40:55 to 42:20 (<https://smallscreen.uua.org/videos/ga-2014-ware-lecture-captioned>)

Ask, “What did you hear?” Then continue discussion:

- Sister Simone Campbell said: *So I do this because of faith. I do this because I am challenged to radically accept everyone, because every time I let my heart be broken open, and hear a new story, I hear something new. ...Radically accepting also means that I hear something new from Paul Ryan, Mitch McConnell, all the people I have on my “mistake of God” list.*
- How did you respond when she said “‘mistake of God’ list”?
- What is Sister Simone Campbell calling us to do, and how are we struggling?

Exercise 2: Similarities and Differences (15 minutes)

Invite two volunteers to stand in the front of the room, side by side, facing the rest of the group. Invite the audience to volunteer ways that the two people are different (restrict the sharing to physically apparent differences). Have the volunteers take one step away from each other, as each difference is shared.

Then invite the audience to volunteer ways that the two people are the same. Have the volunteers take one step toward each other, as each similarity is shared.

Ask, "What did you see?" Then:

- Was it easier to come up with differences or similarities?
- How did it feel to share differences vs. similarities?
- What does this exercise teach us?

Exercise 3: Reading (5 minutes)

Share this reading by Rabindranath Tagore:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action--
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Invite the group to "shake it out."

Exercise 4: An Exercise in Assumptions (15 minutes)

Invite two volunteers to take places on opposite sides of the room, facing one another. Name one volunteer "Nascar Fan" and the other "Opera Fan." Invite the group to name assumptions they have about these individuals, knowing only these two facts. As each assumption is made, ask "assumers" to position themselves between the two volunteers, facing the one about whom they have NOT made the assumption.

Continue until at least five people are facing each volunteer.

Processing:

- What do you observe?
- What does this exercise show us?
- How might assumptions get "between" us and others?
- What are some experiences you have had in your life that this exercise brings to mind?
- How might we break through the assumptions we carry about others?

Invite the group to "shake it out."

Continuums (15 minutes)

Say:

We do not fit into black and white categories. We are complex, and we all fall somewhere on a continuum.

Create open space for folks to position themselves into a continuum. Name one end (A) and the other end (B).

Give the group each pair of words, below, inviting people to place themselves on the continuum between (A) and (B) as appropriate for themselves. Each time people have moved, invite a few responses: "Why did you place yourself there?"

- (A) Spiritual / (B) Religious
- (A) Thinker / (B) Doer
- (A) Poet / (B) Scientist
- (A) Conservative / (B) Liberal

Processing:

- What does this exercise show you about the make-up of our communities?
- What does this exercise show you about the meaning of our labels: "conservative," "liberal;" "republican," "democrat?"
- What did you gain from listening to people who placed themselves on different parts of the continuum?

What's Next? (10 minutes)

Consider next steps for your faith community. Ask, "What do you still want to explore?"

Distribute the [general](#) and [religious education](#) resource handouts from the Beyond Partisan Divide Toolkit, along with any others you have prepared. Take a look at the resource page, "Beyond Partisan Division."

- Do you want to engage the Small Group Ministry sessions?
- Do you want to read sermons and discuss?

Read responsively, in *Singing the Living Tradition*, Reading 576 by Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley.

Say:

Thank you for engaging this work! It's difficult, and your engagement does matter!

Closing and Check Out (5 minutes)

- What is one learning you will take with you from this experience?