

**SHARING THE JOURNEY:
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY WITH YOUTH**

A Tapestry of Faith Resource



BY JESSICA YORK AND HELEN ZIDOWECKI

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the Authors

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Chapter 1 - Exploring Small Group Ministry with Youth

Many of our congregations have embraced the use of small group ministry or covenant groups with adults. Small group ministry can be a way to help individuals build relationships, experience a greater sense of belonging, and feel supported in their spiritual journey in the congregation. The publication of Gail Forsyth-Vail's [Adapting Small Group Ministry for Children's Religious Education](#), vols. 1 and 2 (North Andover, MA: North Parish of North Andover, 2003) and Helen Zidowecki's [Small Group Ministry for Youth](#) (Commissioned by the UU Small Group Ministries Network, 2005) have helped religious educators bring this model into their work with children and youth. Yet it is only beginning to be used with youth. We hope this resource will answer questions and provide encouragement for congregations seeking new ways to engage Unitarian Universalist youth.

WHAT IS SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

Small group ministry is intentional, lay-led small groups that deepen and expand the ministry of a congregation. Two key focuses are *intimacy*, or building community and deepening relationships, and *ultimacy*, or the opportunity for deeper spiritual exploration and search for meaning. Small group ministry is also called covenant group ministry, because the members in a group make an intentional commitment to one another.

Peter Bowden, co-founder of the Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network, defines small group ministry in "[Getting Started with Small Group Ministry](#) (at www.smallgroupministry.net/start/index.html)" (UU Planet Ministry & Media, 2007) as "a way of 'doing church' which strives to deepen and expand the ministry of a congregation using an intentional system of lay led small groups." He says,

At the heart of healthy congregations and life/world changing ministries we find 1) strong

relationships, 2) engagement with meaningful issues, 3) leadership/leadership development, and 4) inspired action.

Small group ministry contains all four of these elements.

We can ask, what makes a small group a "ministry group?" The answer lies in the name itself. Small means a group with a maximum of eight to ten people. Groups of this size provide an ideal opportunity to relate on an intentional level.

Group is a gathering of individuals, sometimes selected at random, sometimes selected for a specific interest or characteristic.

What separates these groups from others in the congregation is "ministry." Ministry is the process or act of caring for another. This relates to the spiritual as well as the physical and emotional well-being of the group's participants.

You might consider establishing a small group ministry specifically for youth if your congregation is currently running a small group ministry program. If so, the small group ministry leadership team and the religious educator should decide if the youth small group ministry will follow all the same procedures or if adaptations are needed. Facilitators for the youth small group ministry will need the same training and support as other small group ministry facilitators. However, the group might meet more often or membership might be more fluid. For other adaptations to consider, see the section below, How is doing small group ministry with youth different?

Can you do small group ministry with youth if your congregation is not committed to small group ministry with the rest of the congregation? Yes, you can. However, without a small group ministry leadership team in place, you will want to plan carefully to ensure support for the group and its facilitators.

Reverend Glenn H. Turner, in "[Designing and Implementing a 'Small Group Ministry' Focus For Your Congregation](#) (at www.smallgroupministry.net/gturner/designing.html)" lists elements common to most small group ministry:

- Meets at least twice a month
- Opportunities for check-in and a spiritual growth focus
- An open group concept — welcoming new members and birthing new groups
- Facilitator/apprentice approach — nurturing new leaders for new groups
- Collaboration — facilitators meeting monthly with minister/coach for ongoing training/support
- Concept of service to the church or community.

Chapter 2, Planning and Implementation, examines ways to include these elements.

WHY DO SMALL GROUP MINISTRY WITH YOUTH?

Inviting youth to participate in small group ministry is a good fit for several reasons:

- Youth frequently do not want a formal curriculum, yet need, and want, more than just "hang out" time. Small group ministry provides a format with a light structure and a great deal of latitude.
- The sessions focus on recognizing and examining members' knowledge and understanding in a faith community setting. The "information" or "knowledge" comes more from the participants than from an external curriculum. This model of religious education is consistent with the goals of lifespan faith development.
- Unitarian Universalist youth can easily understand small group ministry's goal of ministering to and learning from each other. [The Center for Community Values](#) (at www.the-ccv.org/) says covenant groups "meet to share thoughts, feelings, life experiences through

attentive listening, engaged conversation and respectful practices that create open-hearted and open-minded engagement. Covenant groups are small group ministry groups that enhance the quality of life of its members through ongoing practice of right relationships with self, others and the wider world."

Throughout the course of their faith development and in their youth groups, Unitarian Universalist youth build strong communities. They recognize that members of a community are responsible for each other. In youth worship, at conferences, in the hallways of the congregation, and through electronic social networks, Unitarian Universalist youth nurture and support each other, rejoice and mourn together, and share their lives and inner thoughts naturally. Some youth will have a prior frame of reference from their experiences with "touch groups," used at youth conferences to develop leadership. Facilitated by youth themselves, small touch groups help youth make friends out of strangers and increase a feeling of belonging.

Small group ministry provides an excellent framework for leadership development. Most youth want a greater say in what is included in their programs. The small group ministry model allows youth to take an active role in both planning and implementing sessions. Because the learning comes as much from their relationships and interactions as from the session content, the way youth are included becomes increasingly important. As a small ministry group goes forward, the youth can take on more of the responsibility for making their time together meaningful for the participants.

Small group ministry models shared leadership. Whether the youth facilitate sessions in part or wholly, they work together with their adult advisors to create a program for everyone. Youth facilitators who meet with adult small group ministry facilitators will make connections to adult leaders in the

congregation. The opportunities to interact with a wide range of congregants will increase youth's sense of belonging to a faith home that truly treasures them as individuals and appreciates the gifts they have to share.

If you are considering using small group ministry with youth, be clear about your goals. Some goals might include:

- Providing a safe space for participants to tell their stories
- Offering youth a context to practice paying attention and listening to each other's needs, wants, and stories
- Acknowledging the value of each other's experiences; fostering understanding that all are "teachers" and all are "learners"
- Community-building
- Leadership development
- Dedicating time for reflection on how their life experiences shape their spirituality and the persons they become
- Building appreciation for both what they have in common and how they differ.

HOW IS DOING SMALL GROUP MINISTRY WITH YOUTH DIFFERENT

As with adult small ministry groups, before creating a small group for youth give thought to the size of the group, safety, confidentiality, and shared facilitation. In all of these areas, there are considerations specific to youth.

Size of the group. Because of the importance of keeping groups small, you may need to split up members of a youth group or religious education community. This might be stressful for youth who do not want to be separated from their friends. If you have more than one youth small group, make sure you create plenty of opportunities outside the small group ministry sessions for the entire youth community to be together. Perhaps all gather for the focus of the session and then break into small groups. Or, rotate the use of small group ministry with other curricula or programs so the group is only broken into small groups twice a month. If you

choose to use small group ministry at every meeting, schedule whole group activities and publicize them well, throughout the year.

Safety. A small group ministry program should follow the safety policies of your congregation and district. These may include having a safe space for meetings, the required presence of two or more adult advisors who have had the appropriate background checks and signed a code of ethics, and the mandated reporting of harassment and abuse. Learn the safety policies from your congregation's religious educator and follow them. These policies exist not only for the safety of the youth, but also to protect advisors. If sessions will be led by a youth and an adult, be certain to include another adult advisor in the group if your policy calls for two adults to be present at all times.

Confidentiality. In most states, religious educators, Sunday school teachers, and leaders are mandated reporters. As such, if you are aware of a situation where a child or youth has been or is being abused, you are required to report the situation to the proper authorities. If someone discloses to you that they are planning to hurt someone, you are mandated to report it. Be aware of the laws of your state. Even if you are not required by the state to report such disclosures, your congregation's safety policy might require you to do so. Ask your religious educator about your congregation's policy on mandated reporting, how to deal with a youth who discloses such information, and the proper chain of communication for reporting. Often the first step for a teacher or facilitator is speaking to the minister or professional religious educator.

Shared facilitation. The opportunity to build youth leadership through shared facilitation of small groups is valuable and not to be wasted. Plan well in advance how you will incorporate youth into the facilitation role. Many youth will make fine facilitators. However, you must provide them with adequate support. You will want to have a system in place to allow youth inexperienced in facilitating a way to gain

experience and grow into leadership. For a deeper discussion of shared facilitation, see the Chapter 2 section on the roles of facilitator(s) and advisor(s).

HOW FREQUENT, AND HOW LONG, ARE THE SESSIONS?

Chapter 2 - Planning and Implementation

Once you have chosen to explore small group ministry with youth, you will have decisions to make about several aspects of the program. In this chapter, we will discuss some of these decisions.

How and where will sessions be used?

Some options are:

- As weekly curriculum for a religious education or lifespan faith development gathering on Sunday morning
- With a youth group
- As additional programming, such as Wednesday night programming
- At conferences with touch groups
- With groups at retreats or other multigenerational gatherings
- As a structure for youth conferences.

The program of sample sessions provided in this resource can work as a weekly curriculum. The sessions can also work as occasional offerings for youth groups or for Wednesday or other weeknight meetings. Individual sessions can be used by touch groups at youth conferences. Chapters 5 and 6 detail other, more ambitious uses—for example, small group ministry sessions in a multigenerational setting, such as a service project (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 provides an outline for using a small group ministry model for an entire youth conference.

In the sample sessions, you will see both "Questions" and "Deeper Questions." Only by meeting on a regular basis will members of the small group feel comfortable sharing deeply. If the group will only meet for a day or a weekend, keep the questions fairly safe. To reap the true rewards of small group ministry work, the same members of a group need to meet at least twice a month for a period of several months.

How you use the small group ministry sessions will determine the frequency of meeting. Small group ministry with adults usually meets once, and preferably at least twice, each month for one to two hours. Small group ministry with youth can happen every week, or once or twice a month alternating with other programs or activities. It is important that the time be designated as small group ministry, that this be announced prior to the session, and that participants make a commitment to attend these sessions.

How you use the sessions may also determine the length of each meeting. If you use the sessions as Sunday morning curriculum, you may be limited to 60 or 90 minutes. If you use the sessions in another context, you may gain more time. Note: In Chapter 4, Sample Sessions 7 (Is It Good to Be King?) and 9 (Childish Things) suggest using a film as the focus. Showing an entire film will take additional time; facilitators who need to keep the session at 60 minutes can pre-select segments of the film to share with the group.

The time of day when you hold sessions may influence whether or not you decide to serve food. If you do include food, whether snacks or pizza or bag lunches, decide who will bring it and how the costs will be covered. Find out about allergies and make sure anyone who may bring food is informed. Remember to include time for clean-up at the end of your session.

HOW LARGE SHOULD A GROUP BE?

A major consideration is the size of the group. Small group ministry acknowledges that we connect on a personal level better when we are in small groups. The suggested maximum size is eight, including the facilitators. Often small groups leave an empty chair in the room, to symbolize those who have not yet joined the group or who are absent for some reason. This reminds the group to remain open to change.

Some adult small groups only let in new members at set times, such as every six weeks. This could be difficult with youth, whose attendance might be more sporadic. Decide beforehand, with the group, how you will incorporate new members.

When the number of participants reaches eight or more, you will need to start a new group in order to preserve the relational benefit. If this is likely to happen, have a plan in place for preparing new facilitators.

If attendance is low, it is not necessarily a good idea to consolidate groups. It is important to keep membership consistent; be ready to change your focus from the number of participants present to the quality of the time spent together.

WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF FACILITATOR(S) AND ADVISOR(S)?

The role of the facilitator is to:

- Build community in the group, making sure that each person is included, heard, and valued
- Help participants bring their own experiences to the living tradition we share
- Ensure the group begins and ends on time and maintains its covenant
- Guide the group through the session outline
- Establish and maintain a comfortable, inclusive tone and feeling in the session.

The facilitator is also a participant in discussion, but the group process is the facilitator's first consideration. They need to be present, to help keep things on track, but it is vital that facilitators refrain from "leading" too much. They can move discussions along, but the members truly own the group and have primary responsibility for its success or failure.

Choose facilitators for their interpersonal skills and commitment to the program. They need training and ongoing support. Chapter 3 offers

a sample, two-session training. For ongoing support, provide facilitators with regular, scheduled meetings with a designated person, such as a youth advisor, religious educator, or minister, to evaluate how the group is going and to continue developing facilitation skills.

It is important that youth feel a connection to facilitators who work with them. You might ask youth to suggest facilitators. Youth themselves make good facilitators of small group ministry sessions. Facilitation of small group ministry is such a powerful tool for leadership development you will not want to waste it by asking only adults to facilitate. You may have youth with previous facilitation experience who are comfortable leading entire sessions. Open the invitation to facilitator training to all youth. Some will be comfortable facilitating after the training; others may not. To assist youth in growing into the role of facilitator, consider shared facilitation.

There are different ways to share facilitation of sessions. Youth and adults can share facilitation of each session or alternate facilitating sessions. You can also use shared facilitation to build leadership skills among many members of the group. Ask for volunteers to coordinate different parts of a session: One participant could share an Opening, while another introduces the focus, and yet another leads the Check-out. If you decide to assign roles this way, always have a back-up plan in case a participant is for any reason unable to complete their assignment. Make sure you are available before the session to secure any needed resources and follow up with preparation.

If you are a youth who will facilitate sessions, remember there are adult advisors you can call on for help, if needed. If a group of all youth are meeting, adult advisors should still be present within the building for the sake of safety. Advisors fill an important role. They help create a safe space for the sessions. In the context of a small group, an advisor is both a resource and a participant. They might share facilitation. If only youth facilitate, advisors

serve as important resources for materials, communication, and a bridge to the wider congregation.

One of the first duties of a facilitator is to help the group develop a covenant. This is important because of the relational aspect of small group ministry. This covenant, or promise on how to be together, can help the group move from just avoiding disruption and conflict to demonstrating a way of caring. Developing a covenant should be one of the first activities of a group. Review the covenant whenever a new person joins the group, and at least annually. Sample Session 2, Being Together, Part II includes guidance on creating a covenant.

HOW CAN SMALL GROUP MINISTRY WORK WITH A SERVICE COMPONENT?

Often small group ministry or covenant groups include a service component, which Peter Bowden calls "inspired group action." Service to the congregation or larger community helps keep the small group from becoming self-absorbed, too heady, and disconnected. Part of a growing spiritual life, service reminds participants of the importance of their roles in the congregational community. At the first meeting, be ready to let the group know if a service component is being considered. Bring several possibilities to prompt the group to discuss; however, youth might have great ideas for projects they would enjoy creating.

Service activities can include ongoing elements of congregational life as well as projects in the larger community. Deciding on the service to be provided should involve every member of the group. For the success and safety of the project, you may need to include additional adults in the actual implementation along with the advisors. This could be a way to include parents and other caregivers. If the service project is too large for youth alone, consider collaborating with an adult covenant group.

FORMAT FOR SMALL GROUP MINISTRY SESSIONS

While small group ministry uses various formats, it must provide (1) a time dedicated to checking in and (2) questions that invite participants to speak to their individual experiences. By sharing stories and reflecting, with others, on how we, as individuals, make meaning of our experiences, we accompany one another on our spiritual paths.

This resource uses the same format for all the sample sessions. Its components are:

Opening gathers people, and sets the time for being together as special. The opening can be:

- Generic — focused on calling the group together, or
- Specific — related to the topic of the session.

You might light a chalice and share a reading or song from the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook, *Singing the Living Tradition*, or other material.

Check-In allows each member an opportunity to speak, without interruption. (It may be helpful to set a time, such as two minutes, for each member to speak, with the option of extending the time as needed and as agreed by the group.) Check-in can focus on:

- Sharing accomplishments or concerns
- Sharing highlights in your life since the last meeting.

Passing on sharing is acceptable. Someone who passes may wish to speak after others have shared. Not all sharing is appropriate in the group. When a person needs more discussion, make plans for that outside of the session time, and with appropriate youth and adults.

Focus features material that sets the theme for the session. For example, focus material might be a film, a story, or a presentation about a current event.

Questions reflect on the focus material. Questions lead to discernment; use them to promote dialogue, rather than decisions, using these guidelines:

- Participants talk about the topic as it relates to them, without being disputed
- Participants share from their own experience
- Participants can learn from the stories and sharing of others.

Optional activity(ies) offer alternate ways to explore the theme of the session. For a group with kinesthetic learners, add an activity that provides a more active approach. Include a game, to foster group-building.

Check-Out gives participants a chance to comment on how they feel about the session and to make suggestions for enhancing future sessions or the group process.

Closing can be:

- Generic — the same for each session, or
- Specific — related to the topic of the session.

As with the Opening, the Closing can come from various sources.

RESOURCES FOR CREATING ADDITIONAL SESSIONS

You might use the format of the sample sessions here to create your own small group ministry sessions for youth. Find additional sessions for youth in [Small Group Ministry for Youth](#) (at www.smallgroupministry.net/forsale.html) by Helen Zidowecki (UU Small Group Ministry Network, 2005), along with suggestions for ways youth can create their own, unique sessions.

Youth can also use session plans that are developed for small group ministry with adults in your own congregation or from the [Small](#)

[Group Ministry Network](#) (at www.smallgroupministry.net/) website.

Chapter 3 - Sample Facilitator Training

This two-part training is based on the work of Eric Dawson and adapted by Jessica York. The training sessions, 90 minutes each, may be used with facilitators of any age. If the group plans to rotate facilitation among all participants, consider conducting training for the entire small group.

FACILITATOR TRAINING SESSION, PART I (90 MINUTES)

MATERIALS

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- A talking stick, stone, or other object
- *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook
- Optional: Copy(ies) of a sample small group ministry session

PREPARATION

- List on newsprint, and post, the elements of this session—which are also the elements in the small group ministry session format the participants will use when they facilitate their own sessions (see below: Activities).
- On another sheet of newsprint, list the important facilitator duties, and post (see below: Activities).
- Optional: Choose a sample small group ministry session you can use to help you explain each element of a session.

DESCRIPTION

Opening (5 minutes)

Use your established opening ritual. Or, light the chalice and share this reading by Kimberly Beyer-Nelson, "This Is How We Are Called."

In the hours before the birds stream airborne with chiming voice,

a silent breath rests in the pines,

and upholds the surface of the lake as if it were a fragile bubble in the very hand of God.

And I think, this is how we are called:

To cup our hands and hold this peace,

even when the sirens begin,

even when sorrow cries out, old and gnarled,

even when words grow fangs and rend.

Cupped hands gently open,

supporting peace like the golden hollow of a singing bowl,

like the towering rim of mountains cradling this slumbering and mist-draped valley.

Tell the group the structure for this session (Check-In, Focus, Questions, etc.).

Check-In (25 minutes)

Invite participants to a structured check-in. Ask everyone to state their name, why they want to facilitate, and a hope and a fear about facilitation. Post a blank sheet of newsprint and tell participants you will record the fears (but not the names associated with the fears) for an activity in the next training session. Ask for a minute of silence before beginning so participants can settle their thoughts. Let the check-in unfold with very little facilitation to see how people experience it. Note the fears, briefly, as participants name them. When all have checked in, ask:

- What did you notice as we did this?
- What was it like to share? What was it like to listen?

Wrap-up by lifting up these big ideas behind listening:

- Listening to understand vs. listening to speak

- Listening without comment or interruption; deep listening

Pull out any other summative thoughts that came up. Tell participants that as the facilitator, they will model and nurture deep listening skills in the group.

Focus (20 minutes)

Place a "talking stick" (any object that is safe and easy to handle) in center of the circle. Invite people to take the talking stick as they feel moved to share a few sentences that speak to these questions: What is sacred? How do we create sacred space? Only the person holding the object should speak. When they are done, they may return the talking stick to the center for the next person who is moved to speak.

Start with silence. Unfold the discussion with very little facilitation to see how people experience it.

Questions (10 minutes)

- What did you notice as we did this?
- What was it like to share? What was it like to listen?
- How was this different from the last sharing? How did the use of a talking object change the dynamic of a check-in?
- What does it mean to be both a member and facilitator (and what is the difference)?
- What are some things you can do as the facilitator to help create sacred space in your small group ministry sessions?

Activities (20 minutes)

Discuss the small group ministry session elements you have posted on newsprint. Note that this list describes the format of this session, and the sessions participants will lead as facilitators. Using a sample session if you wish, review each element in light of what is expected of facilitators:

- Opening gathers people, and sets the time for being together as special. This can be a reading from the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook, *Singing the Living Tradition*, a song, or other material.
- Check-in allows each member an opportunity to speak, without interruption. Check-in can focus on sharing accomplishments or concerns, or sharing highlights in your life since the last meeting. Passing on sharing is acceptable. Someone who passes may wish to speak after others have shared. Not all sharing is appropriate in the group. When a person needs more discussion, make plans for that outside of the session time, and with appropriate youth and adults.
- Focus features material that sets the theme for the session, such as a film, a story, or a presentation about a current event.
- Questions reflect on the focus material. Questions lead to discernment; use them to promote dialogue, rather than decisions. The facilitator's role includes fostering participants to talk about the topic as it relates to them, without being disputed; encouraging participants to share from their own experience; and inviting participants to learn from the stories and sharing of others.
- Activities offer alternate ways to explore the theme of the session. For a group with kinesthetic learners, add an activity that provides a more active approach. Include a game, to foster group-building.
- Check-out gives participants a chance to comment on how they feel about the session and to make suggestions for enhancing future sessions or the group process.
- Closing, like the Opening, can come from various sources.

Then, cover these important facilitator duties:

- Create a sacred space
- Check in on absent members

- Be a non-judgmental witness and model acceptance
- Allow all to speak
- Build and hold the container
- Set the format and ground rules
- Start and end on time
- Keep the session spiritually connected by conducting an opening and closing ritual and other rituals
- Allocate and monitor time
- Promote shared leadership, which is modeled by how you work with your partner.

Discuss the idea of a service project, including whether it is mandatory or suggested. Provide resources and ideas for facilitators to take to the small group for consideration. Include past service projects.

Check-Out (5 minutes)

Feedback/questions.

Closing (5 minutes)

Divide the group into teams of two to prepare for the next training session. For homework, ask each team to bring to the next meeting a short opening, a closing, and a focus topic for discussion.

Use your established closing ritual. Or, invite facilitators to read aloud together Reading 687 from the hymnbook *Singing the Living Tradition* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1993).

FACILITATOR TRAINING SESSION, PART II (90 MINUTES)

MATERIALS

- Newsprint sheet with list of fears from the previous session

PREPARATION

- Know the regular meeting times for future facilitator support sessions.

- A few days before this session, remind participants about the homework assignment.

DESCRIPTION

Opening (5 minutes)

Use your established opening ritual or invite a facilitation team to lead an opening from their homework.

Check-In (15 minutes)

Invite people to share a few sentences that capture how they are doing right now.

- Start with silence. Let this unfold with very little facilitation to see how people experience it. Then, process with the following questions:
- What did you notice as we did this?
- What was it like to share?
- What was it like to listen?
- How was this different from last time?

Remind facilitators that in the small group, the check-in is not processed with questions. You have done so in the training session simply to allow facilitators the opportunity to observe the results of the process.

Focus (45 minutes)

Explain the "Uh-Oh Moment"—when we are facilitating and something comes up (either within ourselves or in the group) that we are unsure how to handle. Share the list of fears participants generated in the previous session. Ask volunteers if they can think of additional situations that would cause anxiety.

Identify the situations participants are most worried about. If some are not included here, create a scenario to use instead of or in addition to the Uh-Oh Moments provided. Then, lead the scenarios:

UH-OH MOMENT #1

Invite a small group ministry facilitator team to lead an opening, from their homework. Bring in the Uh-Oh Moment, as it makes sense. For example, if facilitators are worried about someone talking on and on about something off-topic, begin doing that as the opening begins.

Give the facilitators time to react.

Debrief:

- What was going on?
- What did you notice that the facilitators did a strong job of doing?
- What suggestions do you have for them, or the group about how to handle an Uh Oh Moment?

UH-OH MOMENT #2

Invite a small group ministry facilitator team to lead a focus topic and discussion from their homework. Bring in the Uh-Oh Moment, as it makes sense. For example, if facilitators are worried about "cross-talk" (where two people are engaged in a side conversation), as soon as someone in the group responds to the topic, turn to them and say "Really? I had the same thing happen to me. Remember that time we were organizing the annual picnic and you-know-who forgot to bring the you-know-what..."

Give the facilitators time to react.

Debrief:

- What was going on?
- What did you notice that the facilitators did a strong job of doing?
- What suggestions do you have for them, or the group, about how to handle an Uh-Oh Moment?

UH-OH MOMENT #3

Invite a small group ministry facilitator team to lead a closing from their homework. Bring in the Uh-Oh Moment, as it makes sense. For

example, if facilitators are worried about someone making negative comments about the group, share that you thought the session today was really disappointing and poorly run.

Give the facilitators time to react.

Debrief:

- What was going on?
- What did you notice that the facilitators did a strong job of doing?
- What suggestions do you have for them, or the group, about how to handle an Uh-Oh Moment?

Discuss other Uh-Oh Moments that have come up and new ones that people might contribute.

Questions (10 minutes)

- What other questions do you have concerning small group ministry?
- How are you feeling about the work ahead?

Activity (5 minutes)

Talk through next steps in the launching of small groups.

Check-Out (5 minutes)

Feedback/questions.

Closing (5 minutes)

Confirm time and location for monthly meetings.

Use your established closing ritual. Or, invite a facilitation team to lead a closing from their homework.

Chapter 4 - Sample Sessions

The sample sessions included here follow the format outlined above. A variety of focus material is used. Most sessions can be completed in an hour or less. Sessions 7 and 9 suggest a movie; make sure you have time for the entire movie, or select scenes to show, or choose different focus material. As you plan your sessions, assign time to all the components.

Within the sessions, questions are divided into "Questions" and "Deeper Questions." Deeper questions invite a level of sharing recommended for a group of youth already comfortable with each other. Note that the sample sessions are presented in an order that encourages youth toward increasingly meaningful sharing. For example, Session 1, Being Together, Part I, assumes participants are newly met; whereas Session 8, The Importance of Being Right, is written for a group where participants feel safe discussing more personal memories.

The sessions may be used as written or in parts. The next chapters offer more sample sessions.

1. BEING TOGETHER, PART I

MATERIALS

- Chalice or LED/battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- A calendar
- Timepiece (seconds)
- Bell or chime

DESCRIPTION

Opening

Share this quote by reading it aloud or asking several volunteers to read it with you.

Come in. Come into this place which we make holy by our presence.

Come in with all your vulnerabilities and strengths, fears and anxieties, loves and hopes. For here you need not hide, nor pretend, nor be anything other than who you are and are called to be.

Come into this place where we can touch and be touched, heal and be healed, forgive and be forgiven.

Come into this place, where the ordinary is sanctified, the human is celebrated, the compassionate is expected.

Come into this place. Together we make it a holy place. —

Rebecca A. Edmiston-Lange, on the UUA website [WorshipWeb](#)

Check-In

If group members are new to each other, invite participants to say their name, their school or where they live, and something they are looking forward to this year. If participants have been together previously, ask for everyone to state their name and anything interesting that has happened since the last meeting.

Focus

Say, in your own words:

Welcome to Sharing the Journey! Today will be different from most meetings because we have several items of business to discuss. Yet today's meeting will resemble future meetings in some important ways. One of those ways is that in each session, we will have time to listen to each other as we share both our common and unique experiences. What we will be doing with our time together is often referred to as small group ministry.

Ask participants what they know about small group ministry or what they think the sessions will be like. Affirm what you can. Explore ideas that will lead participants to clearly understand the program.

Share with participants any decisions that have been made concerning facilitation of sessions, other ways to participate, format, how topics for discussion will be chosen, and whether your group is closed or open (and the empty chair, if one is being used). See Chapter 2, Planning and Implementation, for more information.

You will have the most buy-in if most decisions are made by the group. Use this time to present the decisions the group needs to make. Facilitate the group to make the decisions. Use a sheet of newsprint and a calendar to keep track of ideas and decisions. There are three categories of decisions to discuss:

- Logistics, such as when and where you will meet, whether your group will perform a service project, and other questions about organization
- Leadership, such as who will facilitate future sessions, what is involved in facilitating, training for facilitators, and other ways to contribute to the success of the group
- Topics for future sessions and focus of a service project.

After the group has made the decisions needed to go forth, tell participants that the model for a small group ministry session has a few distinct components. Explain the purpose of the Opening, Check-in, Focus, Questions, Activity (if using in this session), Check-out, and Closing. Note that this session started with an Opening and Check-In. The focus for this session was the decisions on how the group will proceed. Now you will move on to Questions, Activity (if using), Check-out, and Closing.

Questions

- Why do we call these sessions "ministry"?
- How will we open and close our sessions? Should we establish a ritual for Opening and Closing? Are there other rituals we should include to help

us remember we are here to support each other on our spiritual journey?

- What other questions and/or concerns do you have?

Activity

This activity, Concentric Circles, was written by Eric Dawson. It is a way to practice listening. Give these instructions:

We are going to practice deep listening, the kind of listening we will do in Sharing the Journey. Find a partner. Each pair will respond to a question.

One person will speak at a time, the partner only using non-verbal communication.

After a minute and a half, I'll hit the chime, the person should finish their sentence and then the other person begins, with the first person listening silently.

After another minute and a half, I'll hit the chime again and ask another question.

When answering the question, speak from personal experience and only share what you are comfortable sharing. When listening, work on really listening. You do not have to think of a response to what your partner is saying; you don't have to solve anyone's problem; don't think about what you will say when it's your turn. Just listen, non-judgmentally.

Pose the first question:

- Who is someone in your life who you feel deeply listens to you, and what is it about them that makes you feel this way? Or, when was a particular time you felt listened to in an authentic way?

After both partners have answered the question, ask the next questions. Ask as many as time allows. Here are a few ideas for other questions:

- Describe one of the best meals you've ever had; what made it special?
- What's a book you would live if you could?
- Is there a geographic place to which you feel connected or rooted? Describe it.
- What drives you crazy when you are trying to share something with someone?
- Has there been a time you feel you ministered to someone else? What was that like?

- Print out the four skits (below). Make enough copies for volunteers who will read an actor part or share the BIG IDEA in each skit
- Post newsprint for recording members' ideas for a covenant.

After the activity, process the experience with the following questions:

- How was this different from the way we frequently listen to each other?
- What does "confidentiality" mean? Think about how confidential we want to keep what is shared during our sessions. In our next session, we will talk more about confidentiality when we build a covenant.

Check-Out

Closing

Use the closing ritual if the group created one earlier or extinguish the chalice with these words:

May our faith sustain us,
our hope inspire us,
and our love surround us
as we go our separate ways,
knowing that we will gather again
in this beloved community. Amen. — Jim Wickman

2. BEING TOGETHER, PART II

MATERIALS

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

PREPARATION

DESCRIPTION

Opening

Solicit volunteers to read these words, from the Community Covenant by The Spiritual Eldering Institute:

We honor and respect the confidentiality of what is spoken here, concerning personal histories or current issues.

We actively participate and support the sharing of the group, one another's contribution and pace.

We listen without judgment, and support each other in a loving manner.

We exercise our right to refrain from any activity, if necessary, to protect our sense of well being.

Check-In

Focus

Tell the group the Opening words are a Community Covenant posted on the Leader's Library of the UUA website. Invite someone to define "covenant." Affirm, or explain, that a covenant is a promise or agreement. Say, in your own words:

Many Unitarian Universalist gatherings establish a covenant, a guide to how the group agrees to be together. It is especially important for a group such as ours to create a covenant because we want this to be a safe space where we are comfortable talking about matters that truly concern us.

Invite participants to help the group unpack the elements of the covenant by performing Dos and Don'ts skits, created by Eric Dawson for the Small Group Ministry Facilitator's Training and used here with his permission. After each skit, share or ask a volunteer to share the BIG IDEA. Then ask for questions and answer them as best you can.

Skit 1: Confidentiality

DON'T:

Actor A: Hey, what happened in your group last night?

Actor B: Oh, Kathy shared the most touching story about her daughter's struggle with drinking. It really moved me.

DO:

Actor A: Hey, what happened in your group last night?

Actor B: Oh it was really nice. We were talking about grief and I felt I got to do some reflecting on how I deal with tough times in my life.

BIG IDEA:

General rule is that people's stories are their own. You should not bring them up again outside of the group unless the person brings it up themselves.

One challenge can be how to explain this to our loved ones who might feel like we're keeping secrets.

Skit 2: Participate and support the sharing of the group

The actors should all be seated in a circle.

DON'T:

Actor C: So, anyway, this was one of the most profound experiences of my life. There I was staring at this beautiful bundle of life that was my new child... (or whatever you'd like to pretend to share...)

Actor D: (Gazes out the window.)

Actor E & F: (Whisper to each other and giggle.)

Actor G: (Sends text messages on cell phone.)

DO:

Actor C: So, anyway, this was one of the most...

Actors D-G: (Everyone is nodding along and making eye contact.)

BIG IDEA: Listen deeply to what others are saying.

Skit 3: Listen without judgment

The actors should all be seated in a circle.

DON'T:

Actor H: So I had to make this big decision about whether or not to rekindle the friendship, even though I felt I had been burned...

Actor I: (Interrupts) Oh! The same thing happened to me, what you really need to do is... "

Actor J: I can't believe you would even think about doing that!

DO:

Actor H: So I had to make this big decision about whether or not to rekindle the friendship, even though I felt I had been burned...

Actors I & J: (Listen patiently.)

BIG IDEA: Time in the group is not about solving problems but holy presence.

Skit 4: Right to refrain from any activity

The actors should all be seated in a circle.

DON'T:

Actor K (as facilitator): Today we're going to talk about forgiveness and how to let go.

Actor L: You know this is a really raw topic for me, I... Oh, I guess I'll participate anyway.

DO:

Actor K (as facilitator): Today we're going to talk about forgiveness and how to let go.

Actor L: You know this is a really raw topic for me, I... I'll probably remain silent and be a listening presence for everyone else.

BIG IDEA: Keep yourself safe, while also staying engaged.

Questions

- Invite participants to create a covenant for the Sharing the Journey sessions. Ask the group "What shall we include in our covenant?" Choose a scribe to write suggestions on newsprint. Participants might decide to include or paraphrase items from the Community Covenant. Encourage participants to think about what they need in order to feel safe, other covenants they have created, and groups they have belonged to where members behaved inappropriately. Give the group plenty of time to discuss all suggestions. If anyone is uncomfortable with any suggestion, invite them to explain why and ask the group for rewording, but remove the suggestion if someone still objects. Work on the document until everyone feels comfortable agreeing to the promises it contains.

- Discuss how participants will be held to the covenant. Is it okay for anybody to call out someone who breaks the covenant? Should that happen in the session or privately? What are the consequences to breaking the covenant? How will someone who has broken the covenant be brought back into covenant?
- Post the covenant. Remind participants that the covenant is a living document and items can be taken off or added to it. Remember to review the covenant periodically and if new members join the group.

Optional Activity

Creating a covenant can be serious work. Lighten things up by creating a wacky covenant. Make a list of silly and weird requirements or promises for the group—the more ludicrous the better. Perhaps participants must enter the room backwards for every third session. Maybe everyone must stand and spin around every time someone sneezes. Ask if anyone has ever belonged to a group with rules, guidelines, or covenants that made no sense to them. What was that like? Did they follow them? What are the implications for a group that has such rules?

Check-Out

Closing

Use your established closing ritual. Or, extinguish the chalice and ask for volunteers to read the group covenant aloud. Close with the words "May it be so."

3. SEASONS

MATERIALS

- Chalice or LED/battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Optional: Computer with Internet access

- Optional: Music recording of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* or Glazunov's *The Seasons*, and player
- Optional: Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook

PREPARATION

- Obtain the materials for the focus activity and optional activities you wish to use.

DESCRIPTION

Opening

Use your established opening ritual. Or, light the chalice and ask everyone to share, in one or two words, something they like about the current season.

Check-In

Focus

Choose a focal point that explores the seasons of the year. Design your own, or use one of these:

- If you have a computer with Internet access in your meeting space, go to [VideoJug](http://www.videojug.com/film/why-does-the-earth-have-seasons) (at www.videojug.com/film/why-does-the-earth-have-seasons) and watch a three-minute video on why the seasons change. Participants who enjoy science will love watching this and if any do not love science, it is too short to bore them.
- Use selections from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* or Glazunov's *The Seasons* to explore how we feel about different seasons. You might invite participants to meditate to the music and journal about the feelings that arise. Another option is to ask everyone to draw with pastels or paint to the music. Yet another way to explore the music is by inviting participants to dance and/or move freely to the music.

- Rachel Carson said, "Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter." Invite participants to create pantomimes or skits that dramatize the changes they most look forward to as the seasons change.

Questions

- We note key points of the year based on the lightness and darkness. Solstices mark the longest period of each; June 20 or 21 is the longest day of the year for North America, and December 20 or 21 is the longest night. Equinoxes occur when the daylight and nightlight are equal; March 20 or 21 marks this in the spring, and September 20 or 21 in the fall. Does your family, congregation, or another group to which you belong celebrate solstices or equinoxes?
- What is your favorite season? Why? Because of what happens to the earth, or because of a human event that happens during the season?
- Seasons are a way of marking the passing of years. People often say, as they get older, that time seems to pass more quickly. Have you experienced this? Why do you think people feel this way?
- Our planet is in crisis. Human activities have disrupted nature's rhythms. As a result, the earth's temperature is rising, weather patterns have become extreme, and the ice caps are melting. What do you think of the controversy over global warming and other ecological threats?

Deeper Questions

- The lack of direct sunlight we receive in winter makes many people more susceptible to depression. This syndrome is called Seasonal Affective

Disorder, or SAD. People who are severely affected may use light therapy in winter. Do you or anyone you know suffer from depression in winter? What are some winter activities that can counteract the blues?

- Some people experience SAD in the summer instead. Reverse Seasonal Affective Disorder is another seasonal condition, but with different symptoms. How do the seasons affect your emotions?
- Sometimes people have strong feelings about certain seasons because they associate an event in their life with that season. Does any season hold strong memories for you? If so, how do these memories affect your experience of the season?

Optional Activities

- Invite participants to take a personality test to determine which season they are most like. The Internet is full of such sites. For example, [All The Tests](http://www.allthetests.com/personality-tests-character-quizzes.php?katb=04V0) (at www.allthetests.com/personality-tests-character-quizzes.php?katb=04V0) lists and ranks other sites that give such tests. Preview every site to ensure it is appropriate for youth. Do not use sites with links to dating sites or quizzes that might be inappropriate.
- Divide the group into two worship teams. Ask each team to design a 15-minute solstice or equinox celebration. Randomly assign the solstices. Provide materials the teams can use to design their worship: meditation manuals, recorded music, instruments, hymnbooks, and/or a computer with Internet access. Give each team 20 minutes to plan. If you are co-facilitating, one facilitator can sit with each team to answer questions and make sure teams give all members a chance to help plan

and present the worship. After 20 minutes, bring both teams back to the large group. Have the two teams present. After each presentation, invite the teams to talk about the experience. How did developing and participating in the celebrations relate to understanding our relationship to the earth?

Check-Out

Closing

Use your established closing ritual. Or, extinguish the chalice and sing a hymn from *Singing the Living Tradition* (such as 163, "For the Earth Forever Turning," or 175, "We Celebrate the Web of Life") or share a responsive reading (such as 555, "Some Things Will Never Change" or 550, "We Belong to the Earth").

4. WORSHIP

MATERIALS

- Chalice or LED/battery-operated candle
- Optional: Computer with Internet access

PREPARATION

- Choose and plan a way for participants to experience worship.

DESCRIPTION

Opening

Use your established opening ritual. Or, light the chalice and share this quote:

An authentic life is the most personal form of worship. Everyday life has become my prayer.
— Sarah Ban Breathnach, author of "Simple Abundance"

Check-In

Focus

For this session's focus, experience one or more worship services. There are several options for doing this:

- Watch worship online. There are many sites available. The General Assembly pages on the UUA website have Unitarian Universalist worship services from past GAs. Consider watching selections from [GA 2004](http://www.uua.org/events/generalassembly/2004/104920.shtml) (at www.uua.org/events/generalassembly/2004/104920.shtml), [2007](http://www.uua.org/events/generalassembly/2007/27648.shtml) (at www.uua.org/events/generalassembly/2007/27648.shtml), and [2008](http://www.uua.org/events/generalassembly/2008/112314.shtml) (at www.uua.org/events/generalassembly/2008/112314.shtml). If you do not have Internet access in your meeting space, you can download these and save them to your hard drive or a DVD. Your congregation might have DVDs of past GAs or your own worship services.
- You might want to view worship services from different religions. Saddleback Church, a conservative Christian congregation with Rick Warren as the pastor, has an online [media center](http://saddlebackfamily.com/mediacenter/services/Archives.aspx) (at saddlebackfamily.com/mediacenter/services/Archives.aspx) you can use to view archived services.
- Individually or as a group, attend a service in your own or another Unitarian Universalist congregation, or a worship service of another faith community.

Questions

- What are the various parts of the service you attended or viewed? What was the meaning or purpose of each part?
- Who participated in the worship service and how? For example, how was the service led? How did people participate?
- How did you feel after attending or viewing the service? What key elements made an impression on you, and what was the impression?

Deeper Questions

- In the Unitarian Universalist worship service, can you identify elements that make it "feel" Unitarian Universalist? Are these elements exclusive to our worship services?
- What would you add to these worship services and why?
- Do particular parts of the service speak to you? Can you explain why? Are the parts you responded to routinely included in Unitarian Universalist worship service? In the services of other religions?
- What are people seeking from worship? What do you seek?
- Discuss the Opening quote. Does any part of the quote resonate with you and your Unitarian Universalist faith?

Optional Activity

- Plan a youth worship service for your congregation. If your congregation does not traditionally hold a youth service, maybe it is time to start one. This is a big project and you will need help. Talk to your religious educator, minister, worship committee, and families of youth involved. The [Coming of Age Handbook](http://www.uuabookstore.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=946) (at www.uuabookstore.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=946), by Sarah Gibb Millspaugh, has useful resources for planning worship.
- Invite someone who is currently planning a worship service to meet with the group. It might be the minister or a lay leader. Ask them to describe to the group the process from start to finish, keeping their presentation to ten minutes or less. Leave time for questions. If possible, before the visit, invite participants to list questions they would like to ask.

Check-Out

Closing

Use your established closing ritual, or one created by participant teams in an earlier small group ministry session.

5. ONE OF THE LONELIEST NATIONS ON EARTH

MATERIALS

- Chalice or LED/battery-operated candle

DESCRIPTION

Opening

Use your established opening ritual or light the chalice and share the following quote:

It is strange to be known so universally and yet to be so lonely. --Albert Einstein

Check-In

Focus

A [LiveScience](http://www.livescience.com/health/060331_loneliness.html) (at www.livescience.com/health/060331_loneliness.html) article from 2006 analyzes a University of Chicago study that found a correlation between loneliness, high blood pressure, and an early death. Among people 50 years or older, the lonely had blood pressures 30% higher than those who did not describe themselves as lonely. Higher blood pressures can lead to heart disease, the second cause of death in the United States. One in five Americans described themselves as lonely, a "gnawing, emotional state that is a patchwork of feeling unhappy, stressed out, friendless, and hostile... .Lonely people who are middle-aged and older tend to also have problems with alcoholism, depression, weak immune system responses to illness, impaired sleep and suicide."

Questions

- The United States ranks in the top quarter of lonely nations. Yet we are the richest, most powerful nation on earth.

Why do you think we are so lonely?
Why is our loneliness increasing?

- Once upon a time, the telephone was a unique way for people to stay connected. Modern technology has given us many new ways to stay connected such as email, MySpace, Twitter, FaceBook, and texting. Do you think people's use of these is a reaction to American loneliness? Do you think technology helps alleviate loneliness?
- How does technology affect our ability to be connected? What happens to communications and connections when technology is not available or accessible? How does technology help or hinder connections?
- What can each of us do to address loneliness—our own and the loneliness of others, with and without technology?

Deeper Questions

- When do you feel least lonely?
- To what or whom do you feel connected?
- If you were feeling overwhelmingly lonely, to whom or where would you turn?

Optional Activity

Find ways to connect to the elders in your congregation. Perhaps the group might start an annual tradition of hosting a dinner for the congregation's elders. Another idea is a joint worship service, perhaps held on your congregation's anniversary, where both groups, the elder and the younger, can speak to the congregation's history and future. Youth can form a care team that visits shut-in congregational members. If the congregation does not have a van, participants could begin a project to acquire one and plan a fundraiser. The van could be used to transport both youth and elderly members for services and other events. Discuss and make plans, assigning duties and setting dates for follow-up.

Check-Out

Closing

Use your established closing ritual.

6. WHERE SHE BLOWS

MATERIALS

- Chalice or LED/battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Optional: A copy of an episode of the Animal Planet documentary *Whale Wars*, and a player

PREPARATION

- Visit both the [Greenpeace USA](http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/campaigns/oceans/whale-defenders/whaling-101) (at www.greenpeace.org/usa/campaigns/oceans/whale-defenders/whaling-101) website and the website of the [Japan Whaling Association](http://www.whaling.jp/english/intro.html) (at www.whaling.jp/english/intro.html) to make sure you are using current information and to obtain more than is provided here.
- Optional: Obtain and preview an episode of the Animal Planet documentary series *Whale Wars*, available on DVD.

DESCRIPTION

Opening

Use your established opening ritual.

Check-In

Focus

Share these pieces from, respectively, the [Greenpeace USA](http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/campaigns/oceans/whale-defenders/whaling-101) (at www.greenpeace.org/usa/campaigns/oceans/whale-defenders/whaling-101) website and the

website of the [Japan Whaling Association](http://www.whaling.jp/english/intro.html) (at www.whaling.jp/english/intro.html):

From Greenpeace USA:

Each year the Japanese whaling fleet hunts hundreds of whales (many endangered species included) in the name of "science." That's right, the Japanese government has been using a loophole in international law to continue commercial whaling under the pretext of research. And this season, Japan has announced plans to hunt a total of 1,035 whales in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary alone (935 minke, 50 endangered fin and 50 endangered humpbacks). Japan hunts whales in the Antarctic and the North Pacific under the guise of "scientific research." However, the whale meat is packaged for sale in restaurants and supermarkets in Japan, and even included in school lunch programs there. And the Fisheries Agency of Japan freely admits that the objective of the "research" whaling program is to restore full-scale commercial whaling. So the commercial nature of Japan's whaling operation is undeniable.

From the Japan Whaling Association:

We endeavor after the revival and sound development of the whaling industry by collecting, studying, and clarifying various types of information about whaling, and by planning and implementing various measures for resuming whaling.

We are concerned about people having the wrong perception of whaling because of the lack of information and the biased information spread by some environmental organization. Through this home page, we try to provide correct information about whaling, and hope to have as many people as possible understand whaling correctly.

Alternately, watch an episode of the television series *Whale Wars*. Preview the episode to make sure it is appropriate for youth.

Questions

- Article VIII of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling gives contracting nations the unrestricted right to take whales for scientific research. Greenpeace says crews from Japanese scientific research vessels routinely sell the meat of the whales captured and that the scientific claims are simply a cover-up. The Japan Whaling Association (JWA) claims their research is necessary and legal and that Greenpeace is guilty of harassment. How can we honor the passion that is evident on both sides? What is the primary concern of each side? What is the common ground between the two sides? How does passion influence action?
- The JWA says they believe in laws to protect endangered species, but not all whale species are endangered. They conduct research into whale numbers to identify the species with large enough numbers to be hunted. They say that conservation laws can prevent species from being hunted into extinction. Is this a legitimate view or is whaling an "all-or-nothing" question? What factors need to be considered to evaluate the JWA position? Is there common ground?
- Many in Japan claim, as does the JWA, that eating whale meat is a part of Japanese culture. Westerners condemn only because it is not a part of theirs. They say Western countries hunted whales when they needed whale oil. Once whale oil was no longer needed, only then did the Western world become concerned about endangered whales. Greenpeace is working to convince the Japanese people to stop buying whale meat. They say if the market dries up, whaling will end because it's not profitable. Is the question of whaling in Japan a question about conservation, or cultures, or economics, or all three issues? Are there yet other issues involved? How can the issues be further

defined so that they can be addressed? What action is needed to address the issues with respect for all the people involved?

- Hunting is a very sensitive issue for many people. For some people, hunting is a strong part of their culture. Some others consider it morally wrong. What factors need to be considered in determining the place of hunting animals in a modern, mechanized society (like Japan or the United States)? Culture and economics are factors in the U.S. and Japan; and there is great variety of opinion in both countries.

Deeper Questions

- Is there a culture associated with a part of your identity that others do not respect? It might be a culture related to belonging to a racial, ethnic, affectional orientation, gender, age and ability, or socio-economic class minority, or related to being a Unitarian Universalist? Do you ever feel this part of your identity or culture is rejected, or threatened? What does that feel like?
- Japan, Norway, Iceland, and other countries are being asked to give up a part of their culture for the good of the world. Have you ever experienced a culture clash—where something that is a part of your culture clashed with the mainstream or someone else's culture or values? How did you react? Was the clash resolved objectively?

Optional Activity

- Spend more time exploring the websites of Greenpeace USA, the Japan Whaling Association, or other organizations or agencies concerned with whaling. Can you find websites that attempt to provide impartial news and information, or do all

the websites seemed slanted in one direction or another?

- Write a prayer for the whales. You can post your prayer (and read the prayers of others) at the [Prayers for the Whales](http://www.prayersforthewhales.org/) (at www.prayersforthewhales.org/) website.

Check-Out

Closing

Use a closing ritual you created earlier. Or, extinguish the chalice and share this prayer:

We humbly ask the Universe (or fill in your choice) to create SAFETY, FREEDOM and SANCTUARY for ALL the WHALES in ALL the OCEANS NOW. Hear our prayers for the whales' survival and their right to exist. Open the minds and hearts of the World Leaders who govern our nations to the cries of the whale nations. Remind all humans of our obligations to future generations both human and non-human.

7. IS IT GOOD TO BE KING

MATERIALS

- Chalice or LED/battery-operated candle
- A copy of the movie *The King of Kong*, PG-13, 83 minutes, and a player
- Optional: A copy of the soundtrack from the Disney movie *The Lion King*, and a player

PREPARATION

- Watch *The King of Kong*. If the session time will be limited, choose scenes to show the group.

DESCRIPTION

Opening

Use your established opening ritual. Or, light the chalice and share this quote:

Ten poor men sleep in peace on one straw heap, as Saadi sings, But the immensest empire is too narrow for two kings. — William R. Alger, Unitarian minister (1822-1905), referencing the 13th-century Persian poet

Check-In

Focus

Watch the movie *The King of Kong*, PG-13, 83 minutes. If time is limited, watch the scenes you have selected in advance.

Questions

- Did you find yourself rooting for anyone? Identifying with anyone?
- Who is the protagonist or the hero of the film: Billy Martin, the reigning champion, or Steve Wiebe, the challenger? Is there a hero?
- What was the message of the film for you?

Deeper Questions

- Do you play video games? What about sports? How important is winning to you?
- What messages does society send about winning? What lessons have you learned in your own life about winning?
- Have you ever wanted anything as badly as Billy and Steve want the Donkey Kong record? How far would you be willing to go to attain it?

Optional Activities

- Play Cooperative Musical Chairs. The game starts like regular musical chairs. The difference is that even though a chair is removed after every round, no one gets out. Participants have to find ways to share chairs or share laps until

the final round when everyone needs to find a connection to the very last chair.

- Play non-violent video games. Check the rating well in advance. You will need a game console and two-four controllers per game. If your meeting space has Internet access, consider setting up two or more computers to play old arcade games online. You can find Pong and other arcade games at the [Play Free Games](http://www.play-free-games.com/free-games/pong/tennis.cfm) (at www.play-free-games.com/free-games/pong/tennis.cfm) website. Ask participants: Is it fun to play even if you do not win? Is it hard to play without feeling driven to win?
- Play Giveaway Checkers. This game is played just like regular checkers, but the object of the game is to lose all your checkers. If a player can take a jump, they must do so. Create gender equity by inviting players to crown both kings and queens—whichever they choose. What other variations do participants know?

Check-Out

Closing

Use your established closing ritual. Or, play "I Just Can't Wait to be King" from the soundtrack to Disney's *The Lion King*. Invite participants to sing along if they know the words.

8. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING RIGHT

MATERIALS

- Chalice or LED/battery-operated candle
- Paper and pens/pencils

DESCRIPTION

Opening

Use your established opening ritual.

Check-In

Focus

Share the poem "The Place Where We Are Right" by Yehuda Amichai, translated from the Hebrew by Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell. Copyright 1996 by Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell. Published by the University of California Press:

From the place where we are right

flowers will never grow

in the spring.

The place where we are right

is hard and trampled

like a yard.

But doubts and loves

dig up the world

like a mole, a plow,

And a whisper will be heard in the place

where the ruined

house once stood.

Questions

- Dictionary.com offers 62 definitions for the word "right," including "to assume an upright or proper position," "to avenge," "in good health or spirits," "that which is morally, legally or ethically proper" and "the side that is normally opposite to that where the heart is." One of these definitions obviously relates to the poem. Do any others?
- Think about when you have felt most passionately about "being right." Was it

something you knew in your heart, in your head, or in both?

- Consider the image of "hard and trampled yards." What does that mean? Think about the conflicts raging around us. How many of them have created "hard and trampled yards?"
- Consider the image of moles and plows breaking up hard ground. What can you do to create more "doubts and love" to break up these lifeless yards?

Deeper Questions

- Can you remember a time when you were in conflict with someone and you both were sure you were right? How did the conflict end? What are some ways conflicts can be addressed?
- Have you ever had to concede your point of view, even when you thought you were right, to resolve a conflict? How did it make you feel? Proud that you were flexible, or angry that you had to give in? Were there other ways the conflict could have been resolved that would have been more inclusive of each view?

Optional Activity

Pick a subject on which you hold a very strong view, one where you know the "right" thing to do. It could be a global issue (the situation between Palestine and Israel, or inequitable access to a resource such as health care or clean water), a national issue (immigration policy in the U.S., comprehensive sexuality education, or the separation of church and state), or a personal issue (public school searches of student's lockers or vegetarianism). On the front of a sheet of paper, list the arguments you could make to defend your position. On the other side of the paper, list the arguments that could be made for an opposing position. Come up with as many arguments against your position as possible. You will not be asked to share this with the group. Do you see why someone taking the opposing stance could also feel they

know the "right" thing to do? What happens when people look to different authorities to learn what is right?

Does being able to look at an issue from both sides weaken a person's resolve? Spend a few minutes journaling around the edges of the sheet of paper about your thoughts after completing the lists.

Check-Out

Closing

Use your established closing ritual. Or, extinguish the chalice and share this quote:

Whenever two good people argue over principles, they are both right. — Maria von Ebner-Eschenbach, 19th-century Austrian author

9. CHILDISH THINGS

MATERIALS

- Chalice or LED/battery-operated candle
- A copy of the movie *Monsters, Inc.*, and a player
- For Optional Activity: Note cards and envelopes; pens/pencils; postage stamps
- Optional: A copy of the Michael Jackson song "Man in the Mirror," and a player

PREPARATION

- Watch the movie. If the session time will be limited, choose scenes to show the group.

DESCRIPTION

Opening

Use your established opening ritual. Or, light the chalice and share this quote:

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. — Christian scripture, 1 Corinthians 13:11

Check-In

Focus

Watch the movie *Monsters, Inc.* If time does not permit showing the entire movie, ask for volunteers to explain the premise and show a few clips. Make sure you include the climax of the movie: when Sully sees stills from his training footage and realizes what he looks like to Boo. The fear that registers on Boo's face shocks him. He realizes for the first time how hurtful fear can be.

Questions

- Has anyone ever been afraid of you? What did that feel like? How did you react?
- Everyone has times when they look in the mirror and don't like what they see. Sometimes, people will see you in a way totally different from how you see yourself. Discuss a time this happened to you.

Deeper Questions

- People often talk about "putting away childish things" as we mature. One sign of maturity is to let go of behavior that does not serve you well. Sully in *Monsters, Inc.* stopped scaring children and changed the way the town gathered energy because he did not feel good about scaring children after seeing himself through Boo's eyes. Have you ever had an experience that, on reflection, brought you to the realization that you had not behaved up to your own standards? What was that like? Did it cause a change in your behavior?

- Has anyone ever pointed out one of your flaws? Was the comment hard to swallow? Did it cause a change in your behavior?

Optional Activity

It's just as easy to point out someone's good points as their flaws. Think of someone with whom you have a difficult relationship, someone you have not communicated with in a long time, or someone you don't know well and would like to know better. Use the note cards to tell that person something about them you like. Perhaps they make great cookies or are good at math. Perhaps they are nice to their little sister or they are a snappy dresser. Spend a few minutes writing the card. Take it with you and mail or give it to the person.

Check-Out

Closing

Use your established opening ritual. Or, play "Man in the Mirror" by Michael Jackson and extinguish the chalice.

10. NERDS

MATERIALS

- Chalice or LED/battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Optional: Nametags and markers
- Optional: A copy of the episode "Witch Lady" from the TV show *My Name Is Earl*, and player

DESCRIPTION

Opening

Use your established opening ritual. Or, light the chalice and ask participants to create a nametag with their preferred name for this session. It can be a nickname or a word that describes how they view themselves. They can decorate the nametag appropriately. Invite

them to work in silence or play background music.

Check-In

Invite youth to share about their nametags.

Focus

Share this [history of the word "nerd"](http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/nerd) (at education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/nerd) from the American Heritage (R) Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, Copyright (C) 2009 Houghton Mifflin Company, published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved, accessed via Yahoo! in November, 2009.

The word nerd, undefined but illustrated, first appeared in 1950 in Dr. Seuss's *If I Ran the Zoo*: "And then, just to show them, I'll sail to Ka-Troo And Bring Back an It-Kutch a Preep and a Proo A Nerkle a Nerd and a Seersucker, too!" (The nerd is a small humanoid creature looking comically angry, like a thin, cross Chester A. Arthur.) Nerd next appears, with a gloss, in the February 10, 1957, issue of the Glasgow, Scotland, Sunday Mail in a regular column entitled "ABC for SQUARES:" "Nerd—a square, any explanation needed?" Many of the terms defined in this "ABC" are unmistakable Americanisms, such as hep, ick, and jazzy, as is the gloss "square," the current meaning of nerd. The third appearance of nerd in print is back in the United States in 1970 in *Current Slang*: "Nurd [sic], someone with objectionable habits or traits... . An uninteresting person, a 'dud.'" Authorities disagree on whether the two nerds—Dr. Seuss's small creature and the teenage slang term in the Glasgow Sunday Mail—are the same word. Some experts claim there is no semantic connection and the identity of the words is fortuitous. Others maintain that Dr. Seuss is the true originator of nerd and that the word nerd ("comically unpleasant creature") was picked up by the five- and six-year-olds of 1950 and passed on to their older siblings, who by 1957, as teenagers, had restricted and specified the meaning to the most comically

obnoxious creature of their own class, a "square."

Questions

- What, if anything, does the term "nerd" mean to you? Does knowing it might have originally been one of Dr. Seuss's made-up words change your feelings about "nerd?"
- Have you ever been labeled? What was that like? It is common among children today to label someone as "gay" and mean it as a derogatory term. Have you witnessed this? How did it make you feel? What other derogatory labels are being used today?
- We make assumptions about people all the time, frequently even before we meet them. The book *Blink*, by Malcolm Gladwell, talks about how and why we make these snap judgments and label each other. Why do you think we do this?

Deeper Questions

- Have you ever made a snap judgment that hurt you or the other person? Have you ever labeled someone with a label you thought was a compliment but they did not?
- Sometimes people try to diffuse derogatory names by embracing them and using them in new ways. Some people would say they are proud to be a nerd! Have you ever tried this? Were you successful?

Optional Activity

- Watch the Season 4 episode, "Witch Lady," of the TV show *My Name Is Earl* which uses comedy to explore how harmful labeling can be and the universal desire to not be pigeonholed.
- Play a variation of King Frog. In this game, players gather in a circle and choose an animal to represent, each deciding on a simple movement or

symbol to represent their animal. For example, if you are a cow, you might imitate milking. The challenge is that each player must remember all the actions. One player is picked to be King or Queen Frog. The King/Queen Frog position designates the beginning of the line. Play begins when King/Queen Frog does their action, followed by the action of another player. That player then repeats their own action and follows it with the action of another player. And so it goes. If a player hesitates or misses a cue, they must move to the left of the King/Queen Frog (the end of the line). The player to the right of the old King/Queen Frog is now the new King/Queen Frog. As an alternative, you can rotate the position of King/Queen Frog to the right every time someone misses, instead of having the player who missed move. In this variation, say that stereotypes are not allowed. How then will you represent your animal? Perhaps the cow has lovely, long eyelashes and your action is to flutter your eyes. Using actions that are non-stereotypical makes the game harder, but more fun.

Check-Out

Closing

Use your established closing ritual.

Chapter 5 - Sample Multigenerational Service Model

Use this model for a service project involving multiple ages. Session A, The Project, and Session B provide the framework for planning, implementing, and processing a Christmas service project for a nursing home. Adjustments can easily be made to use the model for other holidays or different projects. One way to identify possible projects is to first identify a particular community with whom your group would like to work. Meet members of the community and ask about their needs. Discuss with members of the community possible service projects and the best way to deliver the service. In this way, not only will you establish a joint working relationship, you also ensure that your service is actually desired and increase the chance that it will be received in the best manner.

SESSION A TO YOU I GIVE

MATERIALS

- Chalice or LED/battery-operated candle

PREPARATION

- Research a community you would like to serve and contact the people who can represent that community's needs. Using their input, plan components of the service project and obtain any materials the small group will need to prepare.

DESCRIPTION

Opening

Use your established opening ritual. Or, light the chalice and share this quote:

Good actions give strength to ourselves and inspire good actions in others. — Plato

Check-In

Focus

Discuss the service project. Explain its parameters. Tell participants that after planning the project you will use a few questions to explore the project on a more personal level. Then, the group will break into smaller groups to work on specific tasks to complete the project.

Make sure everyone knows when and where the project will happen and that immediately after the project the group will meet back at the church to process the experience (Session B). Participants are expected to take part in the entire experience to achieve the full benefit.

Questions

- Why did you decide to participate in this project?
- What gifts do you bring to this project?
- What is attractive to you about the specific task you chose?
- What might this project mean to the recipients?

Activity

Break into small groups according to the activities participants choose. The activities can vary according to decisions made earlier or they might be designed to use the gifts people identified. One group can bake cookies or make other edible treats. A group of musicians can practice carols. Another group can make single-sided cards for nursing home residents to display on their doors. If the group has time for a more elaborate project, you might perform a holiday story such as "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." Keep the story along secular lines unless you know all the nursing home residents belong to the same religious community.

Check-Out

Invite participants to share their feelings about the upcoming visit.

Closing

Use your established closing ritual. Or, extinguish the chalice and say, "Let us go spread peace and love."

THE PROJECT

Visit the nursing home (or other service project location) the same day as Session A, or as soon as possible thereafter. Carpool to the nursing home. Remember to bring all supplies needed, such as tape, musical instruments, words to carols, and plates, cups and napkins if you will serve snacks. Take a camera.

Check in with the contact person at the nursing home. Make sure participants understand all rules and guidelines. Everyone in the group needs a role or job. Stay together as one group or, if large enough, split into two groups.

One possible way to structure this time is to gather residents by singing softly as you go through the hallways. Once you arrive at a space designated for your gathering, greet everyone, facilitate introductions, and sing a few Christmas carols. If you brought readings or a skit to perform, do it now. Serve snacks and invite everyone informally to share a favorite holiday memory. Take photographs, but remember to ask permission from the residents first.

SESSION B FROM YOU I RECEIVE

As soon as possible—ideally, immediately—following the service project.

MATERIALS

- Chalice or LED/battery-operated candle
- A copy of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook

DESCRIPTION

Opening

Use your established opening ritual. Or, light the chalice and sing "From You I Receive," Hymn 402 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Check-In and Focus

Invite participants to share their experiences from the project.

Questions

- What in your Unitarian Universalist faith speaks to the project you just completed?
- Did the project meet your expectations? How, or why not?
- What impact did participating in the project have on you?

Activity

Wrap up the project with a chance for individuals to share about the experience. Thank both the group for participating and individuals for specific tasks they performed that facilitated the service project.

Document the project and the small group ministry sessions surrounding it (remembering that you should not document personal reflections without the participant's permission). The documentation could be an article for the congregation's or the district newsletter. It could be a tri-fold poster to exhibit at the congregation. Include photographs, with permission. Sign thank you cards to the nursing home in general and the contact person who helped with arrangements in particular.

Check-Out

Share a word or a short phrase that describes how you are feeling.

Closing

Use your established closing ritual. Or,
extinguish the chalice and invite participants to
"Go now in peace and love."

Chapter 6 - Sample Youth Conference Model

This is a model for using small group ministry within a youth conference. The theme for this example is "Same, But Different." Sessions can be facilitated by teams of a youth and an adult or by two youth. Session facilitators will need to review their sessions ahead of time.

Weekend Schedule, including Small Group Ministry Sessions

FRIDAY NIGHT

Registration

Introductions. Participants introduce themselves. Use a game or any format you like for the introductions. Then, explain the structure and schedule for the weekend. Introduce the concept of small group ministry (including how it differs from touch groups) and assign groups.

Food preparation sign-up. Announce that Saturday's dinner will be prepared in small groups. Each group should sign up for the portion of the meal they want to prepare. (Make sure the meal courses are simple to prepare so those with little or no cooking experience can be successful. Vegetable tacos or potato bars are easy and provide tasks for multiple groups.) *Session 1: Covenant (1 hour)*

Games and/or free time

SATURDAY MORNING

Breakfast

Session 2: Same (2 hours)

Free time

Lunch

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Session 3: Different (2 hours or more)

Free time. If youth will hold a worship service this evening or tomorrow morning, use this time to plan worship around the theme "Same, But Different."

SATURDAY EVENING

Dinner. Prepare dinner in small groups according to the sign-ups from last night. Dine together.

Session 4: Same, But Different (2 hours)

Free time or game

Youth-led worship

SUNDAY MORNING

Breakfast and final clean-up

Worship with host congregation

Pack, say goodbyes, and depart

SESSION 1: COVENANT (60 MINUTES)

Say that sometimes small group ministry groups are called "covenant groups" because they act from a shared covenant. Tonight's session will help the group create such a covenant for the weekend.

Either in small groups or the larger one, establish a covenant. Use Chapter 3, Sample Session 2, Being Together, Part II or design your own session.

SESSION 2 SAME (2 HOURS)

Opening

Light the chalice and share this quote:

Consider the following. We humans are social beings. We come into the world as the result of others' actions. We survive here in

dependence on others. Whether we like it or not, there is hardly a moment of our lives when we do not benefit from others' activities. For this reason, it is hardly surprising that most of our happiness arises in the context of our relationships with others. — Dalai Lama

Check-In

Focus

If you have Internet capability, visit the website of [KVAL](http://www.kval.com/news/local/18495074.html) (at www.kval.com/news/local/18495074.html), in Eugene, OR and watch the video from their newscast of May 2, 2008 and read the story. Otherwise, share the following with the group:

There are many ways we are different. There are many ways we are the same. We all like to win. On a sunny day in May 2008, Central Washington University Women's softball team was thinking about winning their game against Western Oregon University and making it to the playoffs. A Western player, senior Sara Tucholsky, came to bat. Tucholsky, for the first time ever, hit a home run, the ball flying out of the stadium. She started sprinting around the ballpark, but didn't touch first base. While running back to touch it, she fell with a knee injury. With Tucholsky grounded at first base, the Western coach consulted the umpire. Tucholsky could be replaced by another runner. But the records would show that she got a first base run only. Her one and only home run would be lost.

Mallory Holtman, the Central player covering defense on first base, looked down at Tucholsky, made up her mind and approached the umpire. She knew Tucholsky's teammates could not help her, but, she asked the umpire, could Central players help? The umpire knew of no rule that forbade it.

So Holtman, the all-time home run leader in her conference, and her teammate Liz Wallace, picked up Tucholsky and carried her to second, to third, and home base. They made sure her foot touched each base. Not only did

Tucholsky get her first home run, but Western won the game and moved into the finals.

Later, in an interview, Holtman said winning and losing were not important. What was important was the girl in pain, who had hit a home run and deserved it.

The act was celebrated all over the country as the epitome of sportsmanship. In the end, perhaps it wasn't even about the sport. It was just about being an empathetic human being. Holtman knew what it felt like to hit and score a home run. She knew Sara wanted that same feeling. Different teams, yes, but their feelings were the same.

Questions

- Can you think of an example of when it was hard to reconcile the rules of competition with your empathetic nature?
- When in competition, how do you see your opponent?
- What do you think Holtman and Wallace were feeling as they carried Tucholsky around the bases? How do you think they felt about losing the game?

Deeper Questions

- Have you ever received surprise help from someone? What was that like? Why do you think they helped you?
- Think of a time you connected with someone very different from you. What made the connection?
- Are there some differences too broad to overcome?

Activities

- Play softball.
- Act out the story, including the news reporters interviewing everyone after the game.
- Create a mural based on participants' answers to the prompt, "Think of a time

you connected with someone very different from you."

- Bring out face paints and invite youth to pair with someone they don't know well to design a face painting that reflects them both. After everyone is done painting, pairs can share how they created their designs.

Check-Out

Closing

Extinguish the chalice. Sing a hymn of your choice.

SESSION 3 DIFFERENT (2 HOURS OR MORE)

Opening

Light the chalice and share this quote:

We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams. — Jimmy Carter

Check-In

Focus

Participate in a service project. Find a project that involves youth working side-by-side with a group of people who are share an identity most of the youth do not. Since you cannot make assumptions about the racial/ethnic or class composition of your group, you might seek a group with age, religious, or geographic diversity. This could mean working with children, elders, or youth groups of a different faith.

Questions

- What did we do?
- What changed because of our efforts? What did not change?

- If something you hoped to change did not, why not? Can you do something to help bring out the hoped for outcome?
- Was the experience different in any way from what you thought it would be like?
- Did the experience remind you of any similar experiences? If you have an experience once, it might be a fluke. If you have it more than once, you might see a pattern beginning to emerge. What conclusions can you draw from your similar experiences?
- Talk about the people you worked with on the project. What do you think they gained from this experience? Was this project about "doing for" or "working with" others in our community? What is the difference? What did you gain from the project?

Deeper Questions

- Talk more about the community you worked with on the project. Did you find commonalities and differences?
- Why do you think people are afraid of people who are different? Invite participants to share a time they encountered someone different and were afraid or hesitant or perhaps just not sure how they should act.

Activities

- Are there any next steps to be taken to continue the work started today? If so, make plans now, assigning duties, and deadlines. Answer questions to make sure everyone understands their role.
- Create a record of the project. This is could be an article for a district newsletter or a short verbal presentation to be shared with the host congregation during worship tomorrow. It could be a session based on the group's experiences to be presented at the next district gathering or at home churches.

Check-Out

Closing

Extinguish the chalice. Sing a hymn of your choice.

SESSION 4 SAME, BUT DIFFERENT (2 HOURS)

Opening

Light the chalice and share this quote:

We all live with the objective of being happy; our lives are all different and yet the same. — Anne Frank

Check-In

Focus

Watch the movie, *The Visitor* (PG-13, 2007, 104 minutes). A [Visitor Discussion Guide](http://www.scribd.com/doc/6338125/The-Visitor-Discussion-Guide) (at www.scribd.com/doc/6338125/The-Visitor-Discussion-Guide), with more questions and related service projects can be found online.

Questions

- Which character in the movie is "the visitor?" Are all the characters "visiting" in some way?
- Discuss the parts of the movie that affected you the most.
- The movie deals with immigration. What immigration issues does your community have? How do you feel about those issues?
- Discuss issues of sameness and differences as they pertain to immigrants. Do immigrants coming to the United States want the same things in life that those who already live here want? Or, do they want something different?

Deeper Questions

- Invite participants to share stories of immigrants they know—perhaps their ancestors. How are these stories the

same as the ones in the movies? How are they different?

- If participants are interested and knowledgeable about the country's immigration policies and the resulting issues, let them discuss it.

Activity

Point out that the youth are "visiting" the conference this weekend. Even if this is their home congregation, they will never be able to recreate this exact weekend. Sometimes visitors leave things behind. Hopefully, youth won't leave behind toothbrushes and clothing. But what are they leaving behind—what is the legacy of this weekend? In the movie, Tarek leaves behind his drums for Walter. Drumming brings Walter release and joy, and reconnects him to life. What do you hope to leave behind? Friendship? Peace? A good recipe for oatmeal cookies?

If there is a willing drummer in the group, invite them to start drumming on drums or a plastic tub or trash can, if drums are not available. Invite participants to dance to the drums and, when and if they feel so moved, to call out the legacies they hope to leave from this weekend. Alternatively, you can use a recording of drums.

If drumming is not practical, participants can stand in a circle and quietly speak their legacies into the space.

Check-Out

Closing

Extinguish the chalice. Sing a hymn of your choice.

Chapter 7 - Next Steps in Your Congregation

Small group ministry invites youth into a relational and spiritual focus in the context of your congregation. It can serve youth as an invitation to and preparation for broader, long-term congregational connection and involvement. Small group ministry can provide opportunities for multigenerational interaction.

If your congregation already offers small group ministry for adults, extend opportunities for leadership development to the youth leaders. In some congregations, small group ministry facilitators meet regularly with the minister or coordinator as their own small group. Consider including one or more designated youth.

Another option would be to launch a multigenerational small group ministry program. Each multigenerational group ought to include more than one person from each age group represented. This allows all group participants to authentically participate as themselves, rather than as representatives of an age group.

Youth can initiate a multigenerational approach. The youth might expand membership in a small group, inviting people from multiple, other age groups. Or, they might host a special offering, perhaps several times a year. Planning includes:

- Making sure people of all ages are coming
- Establishing groups of not more than eight to ten, including facilitators
- Providing a standard covenant for all groups
- Designating co-facilitators from different age groups.

All groups could use the same workshop topic. Or, present several topic options and invite people to indicate their preferences. Then,

allow topic preference to be a factor in arranging the groups, while keeping age diversity the priority. If only youth or adults choose a particular topic, delete it from the options.

A small group ministry model might also successfully be used in an interfaith youth group. The emphasis on the experiences of the individual could be a useful tool to break down barriers.

Whichever way you decide to involve youth with small group ministry, make the program visible to the congregation as a whole. Use your congregational newsletter/website, reports to congregational leadership about youth programming, and/or a worship service coordinated by the small group to publicize your youth small group ministry program. As the congregation learns what the youth are doing, be ready to explore a small group ministry program for other populations such as children, young adults, congregational leaders, and older adults.

There are many ways to use a small group ministry model with you. Be creative, dream big dreams, and continue to share the journey.

Resources for Initiating Small Group Ministry with Youth

The website of the Unitarian Universalist [Small Group Ministry Network](#) provides extensive information and links to resources. Also find resources on Helen Zidowecki's website, [Backyard to the Universe: Small Group Ministries](#), the book [Small Group Ministry for Youth](#) by Helen Zidowecki (UU Small Group Ministry Network, 2005), and in other sources cited in the Bibliography.

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