



## **Beyond the Partisan Divide\***

Greenville UU Fellowship

Covenant Group Session Plan

**Welcome, Chalice Lighting:** *Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a holy place. We light the chalice of Unitarian Universalism in honor of the light that lives in each of us, the light that shines among us, and the light we bring into the world.*

**Personal Check In:** Briefly share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

### **Opening Words:**

Unitarian Universalism is a border-crossing faith. We constantly revisit what it means to be open and welcoming to all who would find sustenance in our message and our communities. Our first Principle calls us to see the inherent worth and dignity in every person. Our fourth champions a free search for truth and meaning. Still, living in our two-party political system, we sometimes struggle to embody a welcome that stretches across partisan division.

From UUA website, *Beyond the Partisan Divide Toolkit*

### **Questions to prompt and guide discussion:**

1. Have you ever been hurt in your UU congregation by a comment (from the pulpit, in a class, or in a social situation) that made you feel that you were not fully welcome? Please share your story.
2. What does it mean to you to respect the full humanity or the inherent worth and dignity of all people?
3. Is partisan division made more acute by the “unholy authority we give our partisan labels, to speak for us and separate us, one from another.” (see reading from Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael)
4. How does a partisan atmosphere carve division in your life - splitting you off from those you do or might otherwise love? How can this loss be remedied?
5. Beyond the GUUF mission statement (or perhaps captured in it), what, to your mind, is the highest purpose of the gathered Unitarian Universalist community?
6. Can you name a time, in community, when you have disagreed in love? What were/are the characteristics of the relationship that made such disagreement and such love possible?
7. This is a time of high stakes advocacy in both environmental and anti-racism efforts. How might you imagine showing up for racial and environmental justice in a way that makes room for honest difference of political perspective?

### **Readings- Words from the Common Bowl: Quotes/Readings**

**Sharing** - (This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share one or more responses to the session questions)

### **Sitting in Silence**

**Open Discussion** -(This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice deep listening.)

**Closing reading:**

...If we join spirits as brothers and sisters, the pain of our aloneness will be lessened, and that does matter. In this spirit we build community and move toward restoration.

~Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, Reading 576, *Singing the Living Tradition*

**Announcements/Plans**

**Check out:** As we close today, how are you feeling now?

**Extinguish the Chalice**

## Readings

The Mission of the Greenville, SC Unitarian Universalist Fellowship:

The Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship is a welcoming and accepting liberal religious community. We embrace freedom of thought, encourage spiritual growth and practice social responsibility.

### A Litany of Restoration

If, recognizing the interdependence of all life, we strive to build community, the strength we gather will be our salvation.

If you are black and I am white, *It will not matter.*

If you are female and I am male, *It will not matter.*

If you are older and I am younger, *It will not matter.*

If you are progressive and I am conservative, *It will not matter.*

If you are straight and I am gay, *It will not matter.*

If you are Christian and I am Jewish, *It will not matter.*

If we join spirits as brothers and sisters, the pain of our aloneness will be lessened, and that does matter.

In this spirit we build community and move toward restoration.

~Marjorie BOWENS-Wheatley, Reading 576, *Singing the Living Tradition*

When I aged into the youth group, in my home Unitarian Universalist congregation my parents lessened then ceased their participation. My parents politically associate as Republicans. They loved our Unitarian Universalist home congregation. They grew wise in the embrace of the members and ministers, but overtime, began to feel more and more estranged and uncomfortable. I learned, long after they ceased participating, that they no longer felt welcome, that they could no longer bring their full selves to the altar of worship or the circle of fellowship. I bring up the topic of partisan division and bias in congregational life not to place blame, or dwell on the tedious and tenuous issues, but to announce my wholehearted belief that Unitarian Universalism is the faith for our time, a time that needs us to cross borders and break through barriers. I reflect often on this bias in my ministry, because I believe that we are not separated by the labels of our chosen party but by the unholy authority we give those labels, to speak for us and to split us one from another.

—Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael, UU Minister, Sterling, Virginia

All too often, we pace the geometries of our walled gardens,

Believing we are traversing the whole of creation.

With spirits of discovery, let us uncover the mysteries nested in our routines,

With the eagerness of children, let us seek out the secrets unfolding in our peripheral vision.

Let us behold each fellow creature with reverence;

Let us greet each day with praise and thanksgiving.

For life is a gift of incomprehensible magnitude;

Our lives are voyages with unknowable destinations.

Along the way, let us meet, kiss, challenge, and support one another,

Let us fashion a network of mutuality and extend it into the larger world.

In these ways, we forge lives of goodness and beauty;

In these ways, we know the life of prayer.

~Rev. John Gibb Millspaugh, UU Minister

### The Task of the Religious Community

The central task of the religious community is to unveil the bonds that bind each to all. There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others. Once felt, it inspires us to act for justice.

It is the church that assures us that we are not struggling for justice on our own, but as members of a larger community. The religious community is essential, for alone our vision is too narrow to see all that must be seen, and our strength too limited to do all that must be done. Together, our vision widens and our strength is renewed.

~Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed, Reading 580, *Singing the Living Tradition*

\*This session is based on materials from the UUA toolkit, ***Beyond the Partisan Divide***. Many more readings and resources are at this link: <http://www.uua.org/re/adults/curricularresources/beyond-partisan-division>