



A Call to Faith in Turbulent Times - A Call to Imagination*

Greenville UU Fellowship
Covenant Group Session Plan

PREPARATION

- Obtain equipment needed to view the video, at link below.
[Video of Sikh peace activist Valarie Kaur](#), speaking at a Watch Night service, December 31, 2016 (6:18)
- Prepare copies of the transcript of Valarie Kaur's speech, at this link: ["Breathe, then Push"](#)

OPENING (15 minutes)

Welcome participants. To include those who are new to the group, offer the Mutual Invitation model, developed by theologian Eric Law, with these words or your own:

Introductions begin with the leader, who holds power in the group. The leader introduces themselves, then gives away the power by inviting someone else to introduce themselves and to then invite another person to do the same. The process of self-introduction and invitation continues until everyone has been invited to speak. Today's self-introduction will include your name, what community(ies) you claim as yours, what brought you here today.

Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading:

Invite a participant to light the chalice. Read these words from author J.K Rowling from *Very Good Lives: Fringe Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination* (Little, Brown, and Company, 2015), or invite someone else to read:

Imagination is not only the uniquely human capacity to envision that which is not, and therefore the fount of all invention and innovation; in its arguably most transformative and revelatory capacity, it is the power that enables us to empathize with humans whose experiences we have never shared.

FOCUSED CHECK-IN:

Invite participants to take a deep breath together, and sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Then, begin the focused check-in using the question, "How did you do with the previous session's list from Rev. Kemler?"

Link to transcript of Kemler's sermon: <http://www.uua.org/small-group/small-group-ministry-sessions-now/session-two-call-love/we-can-do-hard-things> . The list is also at end of this session.

Invite participants to respond as they are ready. It is okay to have some silence while thinking about this question.

SPOTLIGHT (10 minutes)

Share this short introduction to the video of Valarie Kaur (pronounced "core"):

Valarie Kaur, founder of the Groundswell Movement, is an award-winning filmmaker, civil rights lawyer, Sikh activist and interfaith leader who centers her work on storytelling for social change. These words were spoken at a Watch Night service at an AME church in Washington, DC on December 31, 2016.

Play the video.

Distribute the transcript for those who may want to refer to it during the reflection time, or later, at home. If you are not able to play the video, read the transcript aloud.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

Invite participants to reflect on the Kaur speech. Remind them also of the words from J.K Rowling, used in chalice lighting, which named imagination as the power to empathize with humans whose experiences we have never shared. Ask them to respond one at a time as they are moved, without cross-talk or discussion. Use all three questions or choose one that speaks to the group and go into more depth with it.

1. Imagine the womb of transformation Valarie Kaur describes. What does your heart and spirit want to help birth in our nation and our world?
2. How do the words of the mid-wife, "Breathe, and then push," speak to you in this moment? Do you see yourself as one that helps others breathe, or helps others push, and why?
3. Who whispers to you, "You are brave"?

SHARING AND DEEP LISTENING: We take time to reflect on the readings and questions, responding one at a time as we are moved, without cross-talk or discussion. Passing is allowed, but everyone has the opportunity to speak once before anyone speaks twice, and we listen deeply to one another without needing to formulate a reply, or fix, or help, or set anyone straight.

SILENCE (2 minutes):

OPEN DISCUSSION: We take some time to share what we have appreciated about the sharing, and what questions or longings we have now. Responsive conversation is OK during this portion, but continue to practice deep listening.

APPRECIATIONS AND LONGINGS (10 minutes)

Invite participants to take a few moments to quietly reflect on what they have appreciated about their time together and what longings they are left with, then share with one another in the group or in pairs.

CLOSING READING:

Share these words by the Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen, used with permission:

*Our real work is not to walk away when we don't know what to do,
Our real work is to face down the choices even when they're between harm
and worse harm...*

especially when they are between harm and worse harm,

[and] when we come to the edge of our knowing,

when we do not know what to do, and ... we try anyway.

*Particularly in our justice movements it's so easy to forget
that behind every triumph there are a million messy choices,
a million mysteries with no clear answer.*

*We're told that if we don't know what we're doing,
we're doing it wrong. But the truth may be the opposite:*

only when we don't know what we're doing

are we doing the real work.

*So we bring our bravery, we bring our love to the real work
to the mysteries that are so uncertain*

[but that] in the end are the ones that grow our spirits.

Ask participants to mull this question in the days ahead: "What has grown your spirit before, and how has that continued to make you brave?" Extinguish the chalice.

Extinguish the chalice.

*This session was adapted from a small group session series: *A Call to Faith in Turbulent Times*, authored by Marta I. Valentin, a UU minister currently serving in Medford, MA. This is the third session in the series.

All four sessions in the series are available online at <http://www.uua.org/re/group/call-faith-turbulent-times>

Rev. Elea J. Kemler's list:

Number one. I would like you to go outside every day. I would like you to look at the sky. If you're feeling tired, lean against a tree. You can sit down and let the earth hold you up. Take some deep breaths. I would like you to do this more than once a day, if possible. The more times you do it, the better.

Second, I would like you to choose news sources that you trust, just a couple of them. Read or listen to those sources and let the rest of it go. Do not read, listen, or watch news all day long, because it will not help you. We need to know what is happening. But too much of it leads directly to the neighborhood of despair that Rumi has told us to stay out of. So sometimes you must turn off the news and put on some music or read a poem instead. Rest your eyes and your mind. Because this is a long road we are on. And all of our faith and hope and strength is going to be needed.

Number three is, choose some voices you trust. Just two or three. And focus your attention on what they are saying. Figure out who your leaders are, the people whose voices and wisdom and experience help you, and listen to them, and let the rest go. I am paying very close attention to Rev. Dr. William Barber right now.

Number four, I ask you to think about the two or three causes and issues you are most passionate about, that you feel the most connected to, and keep your focus on those things.

Number five, I ask you to do something to build your resilience every day. Do something to you a little stronger, a little braver, a little more able. I ask you to speak about something, to tell your truth, to practice disagreeing with someone if that is what is hard for you, to practice respect and patience and kindness with the people you disagree with if that is what is hard for you. To say no to something that you believe is wrong. Say yes to something that you believe is right. And to keep a list and share it with the rest of us.

And finally, **number six,** I ask you to do something to resist every day. Do something to resist what you don't believe in and to support what you do believe in. Make one phone call. Write one post card. Give five dollars. Show up for a meeting. Show up for a conversation that feels tender or difficult. Say "thank you" to someone who you believe is showing up with leadership and courage. Make a list and share what you are doing with the rest of us.

<http://www.uua.org/small-group/small-group-ministry-sessions-now/session-two-call-love/we-can-do-hard-things>