



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

Greenville UU Fellowship

Covenant Group Session Plan

PREPARATION

- Find some quiet time before beginning the session. Ground yourself in whatever spiritual discipline you practice, or simply take a few minutes to breathe and release your day, and any associated concerns.
- Set out cloth, decorations, and chalice.
- Post Newsprint:
 - My name is _____.
 - I am part of or claim these communities: _____.
 - I am here today because _____.

OPENING (15 minutes)

Welcome participants. Share information about an introduction process called Mutual Invitation, developed by theologian Eric Law, using these or similar words:

Introductions begin with the leader, who holds power in the group. The leader introduces him/herself, then gives away the power by inviting someone else to introduce her/himself, who then invites another person to do the same, and so on. 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: *Bring Your Broken Hallelujah Here*, by Rev. Theresa Soto, Used by permission.

Bring your broken hallelujah here.

Bring the large one that is beyond repair.

Bring the small one that's too soft to share.

Bring your broken Hallelujah here.

I know that people have told you that before you can give you have to get yourself together.

They overstated the value of perfection by alot. Or they forgot. You are the gift.

We all bring some broken things, songs and dreams, and long lost hopes.

But here, and together, we reach within.

As a community, we begin again. And from the pieces we will build something new.

There is work that only you can do. We wait for you.

FOCUSED CHECK-IN: Invite participants to take a deep breath together and sit in silence, taking in the words just spoken. Ask folks to check in by answering the question, "How is your spirit?"

Participants respond as they are ready. Silence is OK. As the check-in ends, acknowledge all of the feelings in the room, whatever they may be. Offer the wish that our time together will offer hope and a glimpse of a vision which can guide us forward.

Reading: "Let America Be America Again," by Langston Hughes.

Langston Hughes wrote this poem in 1935, during the Depression. He was a leader of the Harlem Renaissance, which lifted up cultural expressions of Black people in the U.S. who had been part of the Great Migration from the South to Northeastern and Midwestern cities.

This poem works well for two voices. One reads the plain print; the other reads the italics. Listen for the dissonance between American ideals and the actual experiences of people on the margins.

Let America Be America Again, by Langston Hughes

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

America never was America to me.

Let America be the dream the dreamers
dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

It never was America to me.

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

*There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom, in this "homeland of the free."*

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the
stars?

*I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the ancient land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.*

*I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab all the ways of
satisfying need!*

*Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!*

*I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—
Hungry still today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.*

*Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave,
so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That's made America the land it has become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home—*

*For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free."*

The free?

*Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?
For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay—
Except the dream that's almost dead today.*

*O, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—
And yet must be—the land where every man is
free.
The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's,
Negro's, ME—
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry,
whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the
people's lives,
We must take back our land again,*

*America!
O, yes, I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain—
All, all the stretch of these great green states—
And make America again!*

~~From **The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes**,
published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., © 1994
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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. Hughes' poem offers hope, but it also offers a portrait of a country that has fallen FAR short of its ideals. Think of the United States today, and share one thing that makes you angry, sad, or ashamed, and one thing that is bringing you hope, and possibly joy.
2. What constitutes a "great" America to you? What words and images from the Hughes poem speak to a vision you have for our country?
3. What small broken hallelujahs might you bring forth? What pieces do you bring as gifts to help our community begin anew?

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.

CLOSING READING: *Map of the Journey in Progress*, by Victoria Stafford, Used by Permission
Take turns reading aloud.

Here is where I found and chose to be brave.

Here's a place where I forgave someone, against my better judgment, and I survived that, and unexpectedly, amazingly, I became wiser.

Here's where I was once forgotten, was ready for once in my life to receive forgiveness and to be transformed. And I survived that also. I lived to tell the tale.

This is the place where I said no, more loudly than I'd thought I ever could, and everybody stared, but I so no loudly anyway, because I knew it must be said, and those staring settled down into harmless, ineffective grumbling, and over me they had no power anymore.

Here's a time, and here's another, when I laid down my fear and walked right on into it, right up to my neck into that rolling water.

Here's where cruelty taught me something. And here's where I was first astonished by gratuitous compassion and knew it for the miracle it was, the requirement it is. It was a trembling time.

And here, much later, is where I returned the blessing, clumsily. It wasn't hard, but I was unaccustomed. It cycled round, and as best I could I sent it back on out, passed the gift along. This circular motion, around and around, has no apparent end.

Here's a place, a murky puddle, where I have stumbled more than once and fallen. I don't know yet what to learn there.

On this site I was outraged and the rage sustains me still; it clarifies my seeing.

And here's where something caught was wrong with my eyes, that I see the world strangely, and here where I said, "Yes, I know, I walk in beauty."

Here is where I began to look with my own eyes and listen with my ears and sing my own song, shaky as it is.

Here is where, if by surgeon's knife, my heart was opened up – and here, and here, and here, and here. These are the landmarks of conversion.

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.

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