



## Exploring Friendship

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

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**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:

When we honestly ask ourselves which people in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing, and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.

~Henri J.M. Nouwen, Dutch Theologian and writer

### Introduction:

We can't pick our family. Often, we cannot pick the people with whom we work and spend a great deal of time. But over our lifetimes we have the opportunity to choose our closest friends and for most of us, our friendships have deeply affected our evolution as a human being. We are who we are today partly due to the companionship and the influence of our friends.

Sometimes we find ourselves in new situations and wonder how to even get to know people. And then comes a moment in which we sense a kindred spirit. Together we can explore ways in which we have nurtured a new friendship, let go of an outgrown or unhealthy friendship or sustained a long-term friendship.

~compiled from UU fellowship of Stony Brook and, April 2012 and The First Parish Church of Stowe and Acton, ME, February 2016 sessions on Friendship, [www.smallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net)

### Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. *Defining friendship:* What does it mean to be a friend? What is a healthy relationship? What are the qualities you value in a relationship? How are qualities like trust, loyalty, mutual understanding, empathy, reliability, and honesty important in your relationships?
2. *Sources of friendships:* Our earliest opportunity for friendship can be within our family of origin. Do you have stories of family friendships you would like to share? What were your childhood friendships like? Work friendships? Online friendships? How did/do they enhance or detract from your overall sense of well-being?
3. *Friends over time:* Have some friendships evolved/changed or faded over time? How have these changes in friendships impacted you? What are some of the challenges you have encountered while making new friends? How much priority do you place on friendship?
4. *Friendships with animals:* How have friendships with animals had an impact on your life? How do your friendships with pets affect your friendships with people?
5. *Technology:* How have technology and social media influenced your friendships? How has the digital world helped or hindered your friendships?

**Sitting in Silence** (Reflect on questions just posed as you prepare to hear readings)

## Readings

In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.

~Albert Schweitzer

Each friend represents a world in us, a world not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born. ~Anais Nin

I don't suppose you have many friends. Neither do I. I don't trust people who say they have a lot of friends. It's a sure sign that they don't really know anyone.

~Carlos Ruiz Zafón, *The Angel's Game*, Spanish novelist

Friendship is the only cement that will ever hold the world together. ~Woodrow Wilson

A friend is one who overlooks your broken fence and admires the flowers in your garden. ~unknown

Friendship with oneself is all-important because without it one cannot be friends with anyone else in the world. ~Eleanor Roosevelt

The difference between friends and pets is that friends we allow into our company, our pets we allow into our solitude. ~Robert Breault, American Operatic Tenor

A friend is someone who likes you. ~Book title from Joan Walsh Anglund

Sometimes being a friend means mastering the art of timing. There is a time for silence. A time to let go and allow people to hurl themselves into their own destiny. And a time to help pick up the pieces when it's all over. ~Octavia Butler

**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 responses to one or more of the session questions.

**(This is usually a good time to take a brief break)**

**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:

As our time together comes to a close, we give thanks for one another, for the chance to share our lives, and to renew our spirits in the company of friends. May we go forth enriched by our gathering, committed to living life fully, to loving life with more passion, and to supporting one another.

~from Gatherings by Tony Bushman and Bill Hamilton-Holway

## Announcements/Plans

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

## Extinguish the Chalice

*We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*