



## A FREE AND RESPONSIBLE SEARCH FOR TRUTH AND MEANING

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

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Date: November 7, 2018

**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:

“Love is the doctrine of this church,  
The quest of truth is its sacrament,  
And service is its prayer.  
To dwell together in peace,  
To seek knowledge in freedom,  
To serve human need,  
To the end that all souls shall grow into harmony with the Divine.  
Thus do we covenant with each other. ...”

~Arranged by L. Griswold Williams, Reading 471 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

### Focus of Discussion:

The **Wesleyan Quadrilateral**, or **Methodist Quadrilateral**, is a methodology for theological reflection that is credited to John Wesley, leader of the Methodist movement in the late 18th Century. The term itself was coined by 20th century American Methodist scholar Albert C. Outler. Albert Outler theorized that Wesley used four different sources in coming to theological conclusions – “scripture,” tradition, experience, and reason. Wesley believed, first of all, that the living core of faith was revealed in “scripture.” One’s “scripture” is primary to the foundation of all of the beliefs and is interpreted and applied through tradition, experience, and reason. He also believed you can enter the quadrilateral from any corner and work around the four parts of it.

So how does this apply to a free and responsible search in a UU context? First, expand your thought of “scripture” to beyond the Bible, the Koran, or some other “Deity-inspired” written word. Instead, think about a body of work, collection of words, or written thoughts that inspire you and shaped and/or reflect your core values. Next, think of how you apply your core values through your tradition(s), shape them through your experience(s), and hone them through reasoned reflection.

### **In that context, now think and discuss the following questions:**

1. How do you make ethical decisions?
2. What is it that you most believe (or don’t believe) in?
3. Do you believe in good and evil?
4. What experiences have you had that led to you adjusting your belief system?
5. What is most essential to your experience as a human being?
6. What traditions do you have that reflect your core beliefs?
7. Have you ever discarded a belief (or set of beliefs) because you found them illogical? Share your experience.

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

**Readings-** see below.

**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.

(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:**

Religious pluralism creates space to ask questions because none of us knows for sure. Our job is to create enough space for the different beliefs of each person. Engage in the Journey.

~Rev. Lisa Bovee-Kemper

**Announcements/Plans**

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

**Extinguish the Chalice**

## Readings

“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- 4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;**
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.”

### ~UUA Bylaws ARTICLE II, Section C-2.1

“As a faith tradition, Unitarian Universalism makes sacred the right and responsibility to engage in this free and responsible quest as an act of religious devotion. Institutionally, we have left open the questions of what truth and meaning are, acknowledging that mindful people will, in every age, discover new insights.”

~Rev. Paige Getty, UU Congregation of Columbia, Maryland

“The Principles are not dogma or doctrine, but rather a guide for those of us who choose to join and participate in Unitarian Universalist religious communities.”

~Rev. Barbara Wells ten Hove

“Some beliefs are like walled gardens. They encourage exclusiveness, and the feeling of being especially privileged.

Other beliefs are expansive and lead the way into wider and deeper sympathies.

Some beliefs are like shadows, clouding children's days with fears of unknown calamities.

Other beliefs are like sunshine, blessing children with the warmth of happiness.

Some beliefs are divisive, separating the saved from the unsaved, friends from enemies.

Other beliefs are bonds in a world community, where sincere differences beautify the pattern.

Some beliefs are like blinders, shutting off the power to choose one's own direction.

Other beliefs are like gateways opening wide vistas for exploration.

Some beliefs weaken a person's selfhood. They blight the growth of resourcefulness.

Other beliefs nurture self-confidence and enrich the feeling of personal worth.

Some beliefs are rigid, like the body of death, impotent in a changing world.

Other beliefs are pliable, like the young sapling, ever growing with the upward thrust of life.”

~ Sophia Lyons Fahs, “It Matters What We Believe.” Reading 657 in Singing the Living Tradition

“It is our work to discern our own beliefs as we live our daily lives.”

~Rev. Lisa Bovee-Kemper