



## **Our Identities**

Greenville UU Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Covenant Group Session Plan

Based on session from First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA, September 2021. Revised by Denise Frick and Jim Hennigan, October 2022

### **Opening Words and Chalice Lighting**

“We seek our place in the world and the answers to our hearts’ deep questions. As we seek, may our hearts be open to unexpected answers. May the light of our chalice remind us that this is a community of warmth, of wisdom, and welcoming of multiple truths.” ~ Julianne Lepp, UU minister

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

### **Introduction to the Topic**

In March of 2010, GUUF voted and was certified as a Welcoming Congregation by the UUA. This exciting congregational vote had followed over a year of workshops, services, and participation in the broader LGBTQ+ community. A lot has changed in the intervening years, both in our congregation and in society at large. The UUA recommends that all Welcoming Congregations renew their original pledge through a series of programs and community events. GUUF has started this process in Fall of 2022.

This session is intended to be a resource to our current GUUF community to appreciate the value of remaining committed to this work and to an ongoing openness to learning about the current needs and concerns of LGBTQ+ people (many of whom are members of this Fellowship). No matter what your identity may be, it is powerful and sacred. As you reflect on this topic with your circle, we encourage you to be mindful of how everyone else's identity is equally powerful and sacred.

### **Opening Reading**

“It’s a girl (boy)!” From our very first moments, other people make assumptions about who we are, which groups we belong to and what roles we are expected to play in relationships and situations. As we grow, we become more self-aware, able to see these dynamics, discover what works for us and make choices to fit our own sense of self.

Many of us spend considerable time and energy constructing our identities, both discovering who we are and evolving who we would like to be. As we go through different stages in our lives and expand our relationships with others, we find additional roles we play and groups with which we might or might not identify. Some of these identities, such as personal attributes, values, or social identities may become more central to our sense of self over time. Life offers us some major transitions, even crises, which give us opportunities to re-evaluate who we think we are and why we are here. – Author unknown

## Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. What attributes or values do you consider important to your identity? Are there groups others might put you in that are essential to your identity? Are there others that feel less relevant to you?
2. What stories can you share about parts of your identity that were formed in childhood? Were there external expectations or stereotypes that didn't fit for you? Over time, how have you embraced or rejected, needed to prove or disprove specific identities?
3. How has it felt when you've leaned in to your identity, by adopting behaviors, attitudes or presentation that seem consistent with a group you identify with? And how has it felt when you've leaned out, by suppressing or modifying behaviors, attitudes or presentation in order to conform to or blend in with the identity norms of another group?
4. If you've ever been in a situation or relationship (social, work, etc.) where you felt unworthy or like an outsider based on your identity, how did you respond (in thought or action)? What changes would have helped you feel more worthy or welcomed and less like an outsider?
5. In what ways have you felt challenged in welcoming and interacting with people at GUUF who have a different identity than your own? How have you coped or worked through those challenges?

## 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.

(After each person has shared once, 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:

“Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.” – Oscar Wilde, Irish Poet

## Announcements / Plans

**Personal 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 meet again.*

## Readings

“One isn’t born one’s self. One is born with a mass of expectations, a mass of other people’s ideas — and you have to work through it all.” - V.S. Naipaul, Trinidadian-born British writer

“I am out with lanterns, looking for myself.” - Emily Dickinson, Poet

“Life isn’t about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.”- George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright, critic, polemicist and political activist.

“We live in a society that wants to label you with a color, sexuality, religion, or ethnicity. It divides us, but it also allows us to find pride in our identity.” - Logan Browning, American actress

“So many people go through life, and they never deal with their own issues, no matter what the issues are - ours happen to be gender identity. But, how many people go through life and just waste an entire life 'cause they'd never deal with themselves to be who they are.” - Caitlyn Jenner, 1976 Olympic gold medal winner decathlon event. Jenner has established a career in television, film, writing, auto racing, and business.

“We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be.”-Kurt Vonnegut, American writer

“There's a point, around the age of twenty, when you have to choose whether to be like everybody else the rest of your life, or to make a virtue of your peculiarities.” – Ursula K. Le Guin, American writer

“I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self.” — Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, African-American writer, womanist, radical feminist, professor, and civil rights activist

“It’s never too late to be what you might have been.” - George Elliot (Mary Ann Evans), English novelist