**The Practice of Imagination**

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Based on material from Soul Matters-Small Group May 2025: Living Love Through the Practice of Imagination. Compiled by Denise Frick Date: May 2025

**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:**

Imagination’s great gift is improvement. Its deep magic lies in the way it can reshape our reality. We are urged to imagine the world we dream of. A world with more justice. More peace. More love. From that, a mysterious magnetism arises, a magnetism that pulls our imperfect present into an improved future. Imagination moves us forward. It makes our world - and us - better.

Imagination doesn’t just improve our lives, it populates it. As we go about our day we reflect on events from our past. Amidst the hustle and bustle of adult life, we can hear the guidance of our ancestors when challenges arise.

It also illuminates it. Imagination pulls us toward a better future, it also pulls the sacred into our impoverished present. Imagination is what transforms trees from potential firewood into wise friends. Imagination is what moves us from lording over the natural world to seeing ourselves as part of it. Imagination can give the world a soul. Through the lens of imagination, every day experience becomes precious, even mystical. A simple act of kindness from a stranger shimmers, and through it life says to our burdened heart, “This soon shall pass. Everything will be ok.” Imagination enables us to hear the world speak.

Do everything you can to soak in the many gifts and messages of imagination. It’s not just shouting, “Improve the world!” It’s also pleading, “Let the world come alive!”

~ Adapted from Soul Matters Welcome to the Practice of Imagination, May 2025

**Questions to prompt and guide discussion:**

1. What is your greatest act of imagination?
2. How has age widened or narrowed your imagination? How has imagination “pulled you forward”?
3. How have you used your imagination to see the sacred in everyday experience?
4. What’s the most radical thing you can imagine doing before you die?
5. What “imagined life” for yourself has been with you the longest? What needs to be acted on or let go?

**Readings**

There are so many boundaries in me,

so many limitations, prisons,

places where a line has been drawn…

But… sometimes the imagination

takes a line and bends it, twists it

like a clown with a balloon,

until what I thought was a boundary

becomes bird, becomes crown, becomes

flower. Or it turns the line perpendicular

so what I thought was a deadline

becomes path…

~Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer, American poet

I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge. That myth is more potent than history. That dreams are more powerful than facts. That hope always triumphs over experience.

~Robert Fulghum, Author and UU Minister

I shudder at the emotional and psychic burden we’ve laid on the young black and brown New Yorkers — so many of them children… Isn’t it, for them, for us, a gargantuan task not to imagine that everyone is imagining us as criminal? A nearly impossible task? What a waste, a corruption, of the imagination… The imagination, rather than being cultivated for connection or friendship or love, is employed simply for some crude version of survival.

~Ross Gay, *Some Thoughts on Mercy*

Imagination does not become great until human beings, given the courage and the strength, use it to create.

~Maria Montessori, Italian physician and educator.

Without leaps of imagination or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all is a form of planning.

~Gloria Steinem, prominent feminist, journalist, and activist

The imagination plants the inconceivable in our minds and makes our hearts long for it to be true.

~Hannah Mitchell, *Imagination as an Agent of Healing*, <https://www.rabbitroom.com/post/imagination-as-an-agent-of-healing-part-1-of-3>

**Sitting in Silence** (Reflect on questions and readings before sharing starts)

**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 or the readings.

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

**Response – Hold Up & Hold Out**

Hold up with gratitude one thing that you heard in the sharing that especially struck you as you listened. Hold out how that connects to your life or clarified something about your own situation. Continue to practice deep listening

**Closing reading:**

Logic will get you from A to Z; imagination will get you everywhere.

~Albert Einstein

**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.*

**Optional Spiritual Practices**

**Five Imagined Lives**

This one comes from Julia Cameron’s classic book on imagination and creativity called “The Artist’s Way.” Here’s her instructions:

“If you had five other lives to lead, what would you do in each of them? I would be a pilot, a cowhand, a physicist, a psychic, a monk. You might be a scuba diver, a cop, a writer of children’s books, a football player, a belly dancer, a painter, a performance artist, a history teacher, a healer, a coach, a scientist, a doctor, a Peace Corps worker, a psychologist, a fisherman, a minister, an auto mechanic, a carpenter, a sculptor, a lawyer, a painter, a computer hacker, a soap-opera star, a country singer, a rock-and-roll drummer. Whatever occurs to you, jot them down.”

For those of you wanting to explore this further, here are a few thoughts. First, from Cameron: “Look over your list and select one of the lives. Then do [an aspect] of it this week. For instance, if you put down a country singer, can you pick a guitar? If you dream of being a cowhand, what about some horseback riding?” Second, you could spend some time reflecting on where your attraction to each imagined life came from. What piece of history, inner hunger or unmet need gives rise to it. Third, you could ask a friend or family member if they can guess which five you put on your list. Finally, consider spending some time asking yourself, “Do I want to keep these lives imaginary? Or is there some way in which I need them to become real?”

**Your Seven Thoughts**

This exercise comes from John O'Donohue, the beloved Irish poet and author. In one of his talks, he recommends this activity:

“There’s a very interesting question to ask yourself and the question is this: What are the seven thoughts that govern, shape and determine my life? It takes a long time to find them out. What are the seven thoughts that you keep secretly coming back to? Because every day you're using thought, whether you realize it or not. And the world that you inhabit and see is shaped by the way you see it. And the way you see it is shaped by the way you think. So if you really want to change your life, the best way to change it is to change the way you think… If you change some of the furniture in your inner world in your mind, then you really change your life… You get a secret look, or a look into the secret way, that you understand things.”

O’Donohue’s “seven thoughts” could have just as easily been called “seven imaginings.” Because they are, of course, more like the themes of a book than cold, objective facts. And they arise more from the creative part of our brain than the analytical part. These guiding thoughts are like the glasses through which we view others and the world. And as such, they imaginatively shape our experience of the world.

So, with this in mind, spend some time this month figuring out and writing down your “seven thoughts.” Take your time. It’s always helpful to start by putting a bunch down and then coming back to the list later to pare it down. It might also be helpful to ask someone close to you what they think your seven guiding thoughts are. Afterall, sometimes others know us better than we know ourselves. And maybe most important: be honest. This is not about what seven thoughts you want to shape and guide your life. It is the seven thoughts that do shape and guide it!

Once you are done, step back and ask yourself which of these thoughts you’d like to alter or eliminate, as well as what thoughts you want to put in their place.