

Topics for Small Group Ministry Table of Contents

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Getting Acquainted, SGM Program and Covenant Review

Adapted with permission from UU Church in Eugene Small Group Ministry Program

Chalice or candle lighting or sound a chime

Opening words

"Each of us brings a separate truth here,
We bring the truth of our own life, our own story.
We don't come as empty vessels,
But rather we come as full people, people who have our own story and our own truth. We
seek to add to our
truths and add to our stories.
This room is rich with truth, rich with experience.
All manner of people are here: needy, joyful, frightened, anxious, bored.
We all bring our truth with us.
May we all recognize the truth and the story in everyone's life.
And may we hear and honor the truths that we all bring as we gather together.
Together we have truths.
Together we have a story.
Together we are a community."

By Penny Hackett-Evans

Topic: Welcome and review of the SGM program

- Hand out and review as a group the flyer Small Group Ministry at the UU Church of Spokane
- Briefly discuss the training the facilitator attended
- Discuss format of meetings
- Remind group that this information is on the UUSpokane.org site
- Mention of the service project

Break-optional (5 min)

Check-in

- 2 to 3 minutes per person, without interruption
- name, how long associated with Unitarian Universalism
- prior SGM experience,
- how you are feeling at present

Reading

We need one another when we mourn and would be comforted.

We need one another when we are in trouble and afraid.

We need one another when we are in despair, in temptation, and need to be recalled to our best selves again.

We need one another when we would accomplish some great purpose, and cannot do it alone.

We need one another in the hour of success, when we look for someone to share our triumphs.

We need one another in the hour of defeat, when with encouragement we might endure, and stand again.

We need one another when we come to die, and would have gentle hands prepare us for the journey.

All our lives we are in need, and others are in need of us.

George E. Odell

Questions (feel free to take a moment to write answers before proceeding)

- What would you like to share about yourself with the group, including if you wish, where you are on your life journey and what is particularly important to you at this time?
- What questions are you facing in your life?
- What do you want to get from being in the group and what do you want to offer to the group?
- Sharing (up to 3 to 6 minutes each, without interruption, depending on how many are present and the time available) If the group wishes to, there can be discussion at the end after all have shared.

Likes (celebrations, gratitudes, thank you, appreciation for needs met) and wishes (mournings, requests, please, acknowledgement of needs not met)/ (a few words or phrases from each who wants to share, up to 5 minutes total) This is in regard to the topic, not a general statement.

Closing words

We give thanks for the gifts of each other's sharing. We say "Thank you for risking your story. Thank you for creating a place of safety. Thank you for listening with appreciation as we deepen our knowing of one another through the weeks to come." Adapted from "Gatherings" by Tony Bushman and Bill Hamilton-Holway.

Extinguish the chalice or candle or sound a chime

Administrative matters (service project, future meeting dates and topics, etc.)

- Confirm future meeting dates, time, and place.
- Note that topics can be found on the UUSC website: uuspokane.org
- Ask people to review the contact list for any corrections needed. If agreeable to group members arrange to provide a list of group members and their contact information to each person by handing out a list and/or sending it by e-mail (today or at the next session).

Living Simply

Weavers Discussion Guide #13 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: Henry David Thoreau

Why should we live in such a hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry. I wish to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life. I wish to learn what life has to teach, and not, when I come to die, discover that I have not lived. I do not wish to live what is not life, living is so dear, nor do I wish to practice resignation, unless it is quite necessary. I wish to live deep and such out all the marrow of life. I want to cut a broad swath, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms. If it proves to be mean, then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or it is sublime, to know it by experience, and to be able to give a true account of it.

Sharing Out Lives Check in

Discussion Topic:

Many of us would like to like to live more simply, to simplify our lives. But not many of us are likely to follow Thoreau's example and build a cabin in the woods.

What are the demands of my life that keep me too busy?

What needs or forces in me keep me busy?

What do I push aside?

What would I be willing to give up?

What one thing are you willing to try until the group meets again that will move your life closer to your goals for a simpler and more meaningful life?

Or if this is not your goal, can you articulate what replaces, for you, a simpler life?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes and Wishes

Closing Words: Kathleen McTigue

May the light around us guide our footsteps, and hold us fast to the best and most righteous vision that we seek. May the darkness around us nurture our dreams, and give us rest so that we may give ourselves to the work of the world. Let us seek to remember the wholeness of our lives, the weaving of light and shadow in this great and astonishing dance in which we move.

Shaky Skaters

Weavers Discussion Guide #14 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: Jane Ranney Rzepka

Roller World is a typical roller rink that rents foul-smelling skates with fragile laces, and then pounds your ears senseless with hard-driving rock music. Roller World caters to people with no standards, no taste, and no class.

Like my family and me.

I love Roller World. No one was born to skate, but there we all were, a roomful of unlikely skaters, doing our best. A few, of course, are hotshots, whizzing around on one foot, backwards half the time, breezy; as you please. And another bunch, sad to say, if hopeless – their eight little wheels completely ignoring mission control. But round and round the rest of us go, steady and solid, one foot and then the next, in careful time to the Beastie Boys or Twisted Sister.

People look pretty darn good out here. I suppose that I do too. No one knows that if ever one word is spoken in my direction, I will lose my concentration and hit the floor hard. No one realizes that if they come up behind me too fast I will panic and crumble into the wall. No one can see that this steady skater is so precarious that the act of skating, just skating, takes everything.

As we roll around the rink, uncertain of our stride and rhythm, may we yet see the instability of those who surround us. May we help when we are steady, holding those who falter; may we calm the reckless and urge the timid forward; may we keep gentle company with the skaters at our side. Let us move with the spirit of love, and may some quiet presence help us with our laces at the end.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic:

This discussion topic about being a “shaky skater” which is just another phrase for doing the best you can as a human being. And as a human being there are many deep questions to ponder.

James Fowler begins his book stages of Faith with these questions:

What are you spending and being spent for?

What commands and receives your best time, your best energy?

What are you spending or being spent for? What commands and receives your best time, your energy?

What causes, dreams, goals or institutions are you pouring out your life for?

As you live, what power or powers do you fear or dread?

On what power or powers do you rely or trust?

To what or whom are committed in life? In death?

With whom or what group do you share your most sacred and private hopes for your life and for the lives of those you love?

What are those most sacred hopes, those most compelling goals and purposes in your life?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: Theodore Parker

Be ours a religion which, like sunshine, goes everywhere:

Its temple, all space;

Its shrine, the good heart;

Its creed, all truth;

Its ritual, works of love;

Its profession of faith, divine living.

Topics for SGM for UU Church of Spokane

Adapted from many sources, credited when known

The Meaning of Money

Weavers Discussion Guide #15 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: Jacob Needleman *Money and the Meaning of Life*

... the passions and drives that surround the money question have been formed in us at the very roots of our personality and that there can be no such thing as authentic morality until we confront this fact in all its immensity.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic:

The cost of a thing is the amount of what I call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run. Henry David Thoreau, *found in Chop Wood, Carry Water*

On the whole we should regard money as mother's milk: it nourishes us and it nourishes others. That should be our attitude to money. It's not just a blank coupon that we have in our wallet. Each dollar contains a lot of past; many people worked for that particular dollar,.. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche *in Chop Wood, Carry Water*

Sometimes we remember a Biblical quote incorrectly: Money is the root of all evil. I'm not sure he's right about it being the root of all evil but it certainly can make most of us act in strange ways from time to time!

What are your recollections of the value of money when you were a child? How has that impacted your present attitude to money?

Are you comfortable talking about money?

What position does money hold in you life?

What symbolic and metaphorical power does it have for you?

What connection do you make between money and morality?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: Marshall McLuhan, *found in Chop Wood, Carry Water*

Money talks because money is a metaphor, a transfer, and a bridge.

When I get a little money I buy books; then if any is left I buy food and clothes. Erasmus

Superstition

Weavers Group Discussion #16 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: Denise Leverstov

Marvelous Truth, confront us at every turn, in every guise, iron ball, egg, dark horse, shadow, cloud of breath on the air,

Dwell in our crowded hearts, our steaming bathrooms, kitchens full of things to be done, the ordinary streets.

Thrust close your smile that we know you, terrible joy.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic:

Fear is a question: What are you afraid of, and why? Just as the seed of health is in illness, because illness contains information, our fears are a treasure house of self-knowledge if we explore them.

Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aqarian Conspiracy 1980*

It is the customary fate of new truths to begin as heresies and to end as superstitions.

T.H. Huxley *Science and Culture, The Coming of Age of the Origin of the Species*

Faith is what we believe in but cannot prove. Superstition is what other people believe in but cannot prove.

Anon

Superstition, the concept has many different meanings – credulity regarding the supernatural, irrational fear of the unknown, misdirected reverence, widely held but unjustified idea of the effects or nature of a thing ... bigotry, fanaticism, false religion, belief in omens, excessive nicety (!) ...

and what on earth do you think Harriet Beecher Stowe meant when she said: “No one is thoroughly superstitious as the godless man.”

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

What does superstition mean to you?

Do you have any superstitions (many people have some they’re not conscious of having)?

Are superstitions something that other people have?

Do you think superstitions have anything to do with fear?

How could something be heresy one moment and a superstition the next?

How does one separate the irrational from the non-rational?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: from the Buddhist religious tradition

Be ye lamps unto yourselves;

be your own confidence.

Hold to the truth within

yourselves as to the only lamp.

The Art & Science of Knowing

Weavers Discussion Guide #17 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: John Keates, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*

Beauty is truth, truth beauty. – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Sharing Our Lives Check-in

Discussion Topic:

We derive our knowing from our culture, which shapes the way we understand and interpret the world. Reason is our guide to Truth.

Part of the Consensus of Theological Statement of the ministers participating in *The Mything Link Project*

How do I know what I know? ... our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it. They affect our definitions of ourselves, the way we interact with others, our public and private personae, our sense of control over life events, our views of teaching and learning, and our conceptions of morality.

From *Women's Ways of Knowing* by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg & Tarule

How do we know what we know?

How do we decide what authority to believe, to trust, when it comes to knowledge? The \$64 word for this area of exploration is epistemology.

Has your experience ever negated other forms of knowing?

What did you do next?

Is everything you learn in school true? How many forms of knowing are there?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: Lauren Van der Post, *Venture to the Interior*

There is a way in which the collective mind of humankind expresses itself; for the finite individual, through mere daily living: a way in which life itself is sheer knowledge.

Go your ways,
Knowing not the answers to all things,
Yet seeking always the answer
To one more thing than you know.
John W. Brigham

Imagination

Weavers Group Discussion #18 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: by Susan Griffin, *To Gather Ourselves*

“sleep leads to dreaming
waking to imagination and to
imagine what we could be, o,
what we could be.”

Sharing Ourselves Check – in Discussion Topic:

“... I heard someone on the radio say faintly, It’s coming in at the speed of snow. I still don’t know what they really said, but who cares? It’s coming in at the speed of snow is something you’d hear in a dream. What exactly is the speed of snow? It’s a Zen koan. The imagination opens and the linear train of thought derails.

Rereading something I had written the other day, I found a typo. I was talking about a dinner party and I had left off the ‘d. Going to an “inner party” sound fun, although I’m not sure how you’d get there, who would be invited, and what would be served. I’m pretty sure you’d get to dance, though, and I think once in a while I’ve heard the music...

I love the flickering things that bump along the edges of mainstream consciousness. These glimpses of an inner wisdom flash like fish in a creek, and if I can grab one by the tail I feel like I have a treasure. I’ll keep fishing for them, and I’ll share them with you. But right now I’ve got to go. I’m off to an inner party at the speed of snow.”

From *Going to an Inner Party in The Rock of Ages at the Taj Mahal* by Meg Barnhouse

Meg Barnhouse says: “The imagination opens and the linear train of thought derails.” And she calls them flickering things ... that flash like a fish...

How does imagination happen to you?

Can you recall a time when your imagination helped you to solve a difficult problem, or got you out of a jam?

Do you value imagination? Or is it just a peripheral activity that you engage in when you’re on holiday, or bored?

Do you make time in your day to imagine how your life, your job, your relationships might be different?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: from John Lennon’s song, *Imagine*

Imagine there’s no heaven – it’s easy if you try
No hell bellow us; above us only sky.
Imagine all the people living for today...
Imagine there’s no countries
I wonder if you can...
Nothing to kill or die for –
A comradeship of all.
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace...

Inspiration

Weavers Discussion Guide # 19 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: Wanda Landowska in *Landowska on Music* 1964, Denise Risout, ed.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic:

Inspiration is disturbing. She does not believe in guarantees or insurance or strict schedules. She is not interested in how well you write your grant proposal or what you do for a living or why you are too busy to see her. She will be there when you need her but you have to take it on trust. Surrender. She knows when you need her better than you do.

From *A Book of Qualities* by J. Ruth Gendler

I never could tell where inspiration begins and impulse leaves off. I suppose the answer is in the outcome. If your hunch proves a good one, you were inspired; if it proves a bad, you are guilty of yielding to thoughtless impulse.

From Beryl Markham West, *West with the Night*, 1942

What is your experience with inspiration? Do you have any techniques for bringing it into being? Is it important to you? Do we need to take it on trust and surrender to it, or can we call it into being? Is it just another word for a successful hunch?

Have you done any reading about those people who have been inspired and have created things of unexpected beauty or undesirable terror?

Wrap – up comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: *Vesalius in Zante, Artemis to Actaeon*, Edith Wharton, 1909

There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the light which reflects it.

Guilt – is it good for you?

Weavers Group Discussion Guide # 20 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: *The New York Times*, February 4, 1989

It was the best of Januaries and the worst of Januaries. Best because the midday sun felt like late March, the evening air gave hints of April, the snowdrops popped up even earlier than usual. Worst because of the worry that this was the greenhouse effect, already starting to warm things up.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in Discussion Topic:

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, often, the surfeits of our own behavior, - we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars, as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance, drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence ...”

William Shakespeare, *King Lear*

“and now at this point in the meeting I’d like to shift the blame away from me and onto someone else.”

Cartoon by Michael Maslin in *The New Yorker*, August 19, 1985

Guilt is many things to many people. It is both a feeling and a function of the intellect, it can be either neurotic or natural. And it seems to have gone out of favour these days! And yet I like Mark Twain’s comment, “Man (sic) is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to”.

Jane Bramadat

What good is guilt?

Are there times or places when guilt is inappropriate?

How would you differentiate between guilt and conscience?

Is a sense of “entitlement” ever used to rationalize away guilt?

If you don’t feel guilty, what do you feel and what do you do when you have harmed another or yourself?

What are the steps required to move back into right relationship?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: Marianne Moore, *What Are Years?*

What is our innocence’

what is our guilt?

all are

naked, none is safe.

Topics for SGM for UU Church of Spokane

Adapted from many sources, credited when known

What Makes a Family?

Weavers Group Discussion #21 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: *Families*, by Jane Howard 1978

Call it a clan, call it a network,
call it a tribe, call it a family,
whatever you call it,
whoever you are,
you need one.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic:

What families have in common the world around is that they are the place where people learn who they are and how to be that way.

Self – Esteem: A Family Affair by Jean Illsley Clarke, 1978

Family Life! The United Nations is child's play compared to the tugs and splits and need to understand and forgive in any family.

Kinds of Love, by UU May Sarton, 1970

What is the difference between what family means today and what it meant in the past?

How many different kinds of families do you know?

How many *families* to you belong to? How would you describe them?

If you family of origin was less healthy or balanced it its interactions, what are your choices?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: Letty Cottin Pogrebin, *Chop Wood, Carry Water*

If the family were a container, it would be a nest, an enduring nest, loosely woven, expansive, and open.

If the family were a fruit, it would be an orange, a circle of sections, held together but separable – each segment distinct.

If the family were a boat, it would be a canoe that makes no progress unless everyone paddles.

If the family were a sport, it would be baseball: a long slow, non-violent game that is never over until the last out.

If the family were a building, it would be an old but solid structure that contains human history, and appeals to those who see the carved moldings under all the plaster, the wide plank floors under the linoleum, the possibilities.

Dealing with Anger

Weavers Discussion Guide #22 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: Gandhi, in *Anger the Misunderstood Emotion* by Carol Tavris

In the march towards *truth*, anger, selfishness, hatred, etc. naturally give way, for otherwise *truth* would be impossible to attain. A man (sic) who is swayed by passions may have good enough intentions, may be truthful in word, but he will never find the *truth*.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic:

... the reason we have so much abuse in our families is that we do not allow anger in our families. If rage can come out, it can spend itself and be done with ... It's not hatred expressed that's the problem; it's hatred swallowed.

John Bradshaw in *Lear's*

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end,
I was angry with my foe:
I hid my wrath, my wrath did grow.
William Blake

How does our society deal with anger?

What part of anger is rage? Is it controllable?

What is the impact of *increasing road rage, travel rage* etc., that we are seeing in our culture? Think about the William Blake quotation – When you express your anger at a friend does it go away?

How do we deal with anger?

How differently do we express our anger at home, at work, in our religious community, with our friends?

What is the difference between anger and aggression?

What are *healthy* ways of dealing with aggression? What are *unhealthy* ways?

Is any of this discussion religious or spiritual? Are we not called to be uncomfortable with the status quo? Trying to change the status quo will definitely result in anger in some quarters?

What about the Hebrew prophets? It was only after they got really ticked – off that anything changed...

What about Jihad which, actually has to do with a *spiritual struggle*. There will be anger involved here, but more the kind that will struggle with one's own ego.

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: Carol Tavris, *Anger the Misunderstood Emotion*

Anger is as useless as the waves of the ocean without wind.

The greatest remedy for anger is delay.

He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding.

The person who pursues revenge should dig two graves.

Topics for SGM for UU Church of Spokane

Adapted from many sources, credited when known

Poetry

Weavers Group Discussion #23 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words:

The Poet is like a cocoon; in him (sic) the caterpillar of the past finds rest, and from him (sic) the butterfly of the future emerges.

A.M. Klein in *Colombo's New Canadian Quotations*

When power leads man (and woman) toward arrogance, poetry reminds both of their limitations. When power narrows the areas of human concern poetry reminds humanity of the richness and diversity of their existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses, for art establishes the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstone of our judgment.

J.F. Kennedy

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic:

This session takes planning. Ask the participants to bring a poem that has changed their life: a simple poem from childhood, their own poem, a familiar Biblical one, or whatever they wish to bring. Participants will share their poems at the session. As the session unfolds ask the question: How is your life different because of this poem?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: Nancy Wood

hold on to what is good

even if it is

a handful of earth.

Hold on to what you believe

even if it is

a long way from here.

Hold on to my hand even when

I have gone away.

Music

Weavers Discussion Guide #24 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: Rev. Jane Bramadat

The trouble with music appreciation in general is that people are taught to have too much respect for the music; they should be taught to love it instead.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic:

Be sure to share this topic the month ahead. Ask the participants to bring a tape or CD that has been important to them. It could be music that was played at their wedding or ceremony of union. It could be music that is uplifting or calming. Ask the participants to come prepared to share a little bit about why this piece of music is important to them.

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: Rev. Jane Bramadat

After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music.

Spirituality – What and Where

Weavers Discussion Guide #25 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: Dag Hammarskjöld

I am being driven forward
Into an unknown land.
The pass grows steeper
The air colder and sharper
A wind from my unknown goal
Stirs the strings of expectation.
Still the question
Shall ever get there?
There where life resounds
A clear pure note in the silence.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic: Walking the vast territory of spirituality never means to know its geography. What difficult words spirit and spirituality are. The term spirit refers often to world soul, breath of life, immaterial substance, ultimate reality and absolute consciousness. The attributes of the spirit are unspecific and varied. Instead of understanding spirit and spirituality as nouns, one should consider them as verbs, activities both explicit and implicit. Spirituality, an equivalent to religiosity, involves intelligence that transcends ordinary sensory, perceptual, cognitive and emotional states. Spirituality is an awakening to one's total involvement in a boundless ground of being. Both quotes are from *Musing of an Inquisitive Mind* by Jaroslav Havelka

- Do you see yourself as a spiritual being? If you don't see yourself as being spiritual, what word would you use to describe your response to unexpected moments of grace, love, and connection?
- Can you express what spirituality means to you? How important is it to you?
- What activities do engage in that would qualify as spiritual in your mind?
- Do you expect your religious community to be spiritual?
- Can one be spiritual by one's self? Is that the best way to be spiritual? Is there any best way?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: Nancy Woods, *Spirit Walker*

Spirit Walker, with long legs poking out of rain clouds
Along the mesa tops,
Listen to our prayers for understanding.
Spirit Walker, with strong arms embracing the wounded Earth,
We ask for forgiveness for our greed.
Spirit Walker, with footsteps echoing like promises
Across the aching land,
Give Fire and Ice to purify us.
Spirit Walker, with tears that fall as Snow and Rain,
Heal our forests and our rivers,
Our Homes and the hearts of all creatures.
Spirit Walker, heed the cry of every living thing
And bathe the Earth with harmony.

The Dark Gifts

Weavers Discussion Guide #26 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: Jean Houston in *A Dancing Star* Eileen Campbell, ed.

In times of suffering, when you feel abandoned, perhaps even annihilated, there is occurring at levels deeper than your pain the entry of the sacred, the possibility of redemption. Wounding opens doors of our sensibility to a larger reality. Pathos gives us eyes and ears to see and hear what our normal eyes and ears cannot.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic:

In his book *Small Graces*, theologian and religious and art philosopher Kent Nerburn talks about life being a dark gift because it introduces us, once and for all, to an indifferent world. We are, in many ways, always alone and never certain just how friendly the universe really is. The first time we have something happen to us that we feel we did not deserve at all, we meet this dark gift. Why me? Why now? For some of us this is a devastating experience. I think the first time for me was when as age eight I was accused of causing an old woman to fall down her apartment stairs and made to go and apologize to her. My relationship with the dark gift continues today. At least, last year when I fell down while playing soccer on a perfectly flat beach and ripped all my hamstrings and separated my shoulder from my collarbone, I certainly felt like I had a relationship.

Have you met the dark gift?

What has been your response?

If the universe is indeed indifferent, what does that say about life itself?

Is it always indifferent? Can we make a difference? Is there also a light gift?

Wrap – up Comments --- Lies & Wishes

Closing Words: Thomas Merton in *A Dancing Star*, Eileen Campbell, ed.

We live on the brink of disaster because we do not know how to let life alone. We do not respect the living and fruitful contradictions and paradoxes of which true life is full.

Lifestyles

Weavers Group Discussion #27 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: Nadine Stair, Louisville, Kentucky, in *Mindstyles, Lifestyles*

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic:

What makes for a good lifestyle? There's a lot of variety around, and often we are surprised that our neighbors, our friends, some of our family even, don't live exactly the same way we do.

What is meant by lifestyle anyway? A lifestyle is the way you choose to organize your life and live out your life meaning; the rhythm it has, the activities it contains, the boundaries it erects, the pleasures it garners and the disappointments it finds.

What is your lifestyle? Do you live alone, with a partner and/or children? Do you eat your meals together, at home? Do you share bank accounts, religious and social events? Has your religion helped to clarify what lifestyle suits you best? Do you take holidays together? Do you take holidays?

In your lifestyle, does it matter if you are socially responsible: What gives you your greatest pleasure? What would devastate you most? Have you ever changed your lifestyle? What happened? How would you describe your lifestyle now? Is this easy to talk about?

Talk about your lifestyle as much as you are comfortable...

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words:

If I had my life to live over, I would start barefoot earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall. I would go to more dances. I would ride more merry-go-rounds. I would pick more daisies.

Nadine Stairs, *Mindstyles, Lifestyles*

Here is my challenge to you: don't wait for the next life – let your lifestyle contain your dreams and your realities now.

Rev. Jane Bramadat

Is there any place for shame in our lives

Weavers Discussion Guide #28 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: *The Rubbaiyat of Omar Khayyam*

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into dust descend.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic: part of a poem by Alice Walker found in *Cries of the Spirit*, ed. Marilyn Walker

I tell you, Chickadee
I am afraid of people
who cannot cry
Tears left unshed
turn to poison
in the ducts
Ask the next soldier you see
enjoying a massacre
if this is not so
People who do not cry
are victims
of soul mutilation
paid for in Marlboros
and trucks

Shame: one definition of shame is how you feel when you know you have fallen short of your own ideals – failing to realize one’s own aspirations. Shame is also seen as feelings that have been produced by others.

From *What’s So Bad about Guilt?* by Rabbi Harlan J. Wechsler

I don’t know for sure how I feel about this sort of emotion. At one level it is quite introspective. I think I believe shame can be cathartic to recognize that one is not reaching one’s goals and aspirations if it helps one to become even more determined to reach them or to let them go and find more realistic goals. What do you think?

Rev. Jane Bramadat

Is shame something that need to remain within one’s self?

Do you recall being at a rally protesting some human rights violation and hearing someone call out, Shame, Shame! How does this make you feel? Did you ever take up the call?

If you ever feel shame, does it help you to share it with someone you trust?

Is there any difference between a person’s shame and a nations shame?

How does a nation’s shame show itself?

How would one let go of shame?

Is there anything our religious community does or doesn’t do that we ought to consider shameful?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

(continues next page)

Closing Words:

The Legacy of Caring

Despair is my privat pain
Born from what I have failed to say
Failed to do, failed to overcome.

Be still my inner self
Let me rise to you, let me reach
Down into your pain
And soothe you

I turn to you to renew my life
I turn to the world, the streets of
The city, the worn tapestries of
Brokerage firms,

Drug dealers, private estates
Personal things in the bag
Lady's cart

Rage and pain in the faces that
Turn from me
Afraid of their own inner worlds

This common world I love anew,
As the life blood of generations
Who refused to surrender their
Humanity
In an inhumane world
Courses through my veins.

From within this world
My despair is transformed to hope

And I begin anew
The legacy of caring.
Thandeka

May we each in our own fashion, as individuals or citizens, overcome any shame that comes our way;
May we work to keep from having poison in our ducts, or cancers in our souls;
May we deal with any failings, with steadfast humility and courage and then let them go, let them go;
May we build ourselves again and again and again.
Rev. Jane Bramadat

The Spirit of Life & Art

Weavers Group Discussion #29 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: Picasso

Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he (sic) grows up.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Guide:

I hope that during our time together you will share what there is about the art you have brought with you that connects you to the Spirit of Life to that quality that frees you to recognize beauty, meaning and struggle in the medium of art. Talk about what it means to you and how it has impacted it has impacted upon your values and your life.

The functions of the artist in correcting the unconscious bias of perception in any given culture can be betrayed if he (sic) merely repeats the bias of the culture instead of readjusting it. In this sense the role of art is to create the means of perception by creating counter-environments that open the door of perception to people otherwise numbed in a non-perceivable situation.

Marshall McLuhan

In other words, how has the art that stimulates you and gets your attention, opened the door of your perception?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: Rev. Jane Bramadat

Art gives us pictures of life, an awareness that helps us to connect to the Spirit; acknowledge good and evil and everything in-between; enlarge our hearts and minds and be open to transformation.

The Meaning of Democracy: How we use and abuse it

Weavers Discussion Guide #30 From Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: W.E.B. Du Bois

Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, no some more convenient season.

It is today that our best work can be done and not some future day or future year.

It is today that we fit ourselves for the greater usefulness of tomorrow.

Today is the seed time, now are the hours of work, and tomorrow comes the harvest and the playtime.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic:

Democracy like the human organism, carries within it the seed of its own destruction.

C.V. Wedgwood

Democracy is not an easy form of government, because it is never final; it is a living changing organism, with a continuous shifting and adjusting of balance between individual freedom and general order.

Ilka Chase

The danger of democracy has always been the danger of an electorate seized y passivity.

Dalton Camp

In a dictatorship, the people are afraid to tell the truth to the leaders; in a democracy the leaders are afraid to tell the truth to the people.

Richard Needham

Can you think of any other dangers of democracy besides passivity?

What is your working definition of democracy?

How many forms of democracy are there?

How would you know if democracy was losing ground?

Can you think of a better system than democracy?

What are some of the advantages of other systems?

In our faith we try to practice religious democracy. How do you participate in it?

Do you participate in any form of political democracy? How?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: Jewish Prayer

Grant us the ability to find joy

And strength

Not in the strident call to arms,

But in stretching out our arms

To grasp our fellow creatures

In the striving for justice and

Truth.

Do you incorporate play into your day?

Weavers Discussion Guide #31 from Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: Joshu Sasaki-Roshi

As a butterfly lost in flowers
As a child fondling mother's breast
As a bird settled on the tree
For 66 years of this world
I have played with God.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic:

Do you make time in your day, in your week, in your month for play?
What sort of play do you enjoy most? How many kinds of play do you enjoy?
Do you consider play to be an optional or essential part of life?
What are its advantages to your mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health?

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: *Chop Wood, Carry Water*

Playfulness is as sacred as any prayer, or maybe more sacred than any prayer, because playfulness, laughter, singing, dancing will relax you. And the truth is only possible in a relaxed state of being.

Community Service

Weavers Discussion Guide #32 From Erin Fitzgerald,
Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane

Opening Words: Benjamin Franklin
Well done is better than well said.

Sharing Our Lives Check – in

Discussion Topic:

When you are laboring for others let it be with the same zeal as if it were for yourself. Confucius

During our time together as an SGM we will have the opportunity to get to know one another in a deeper way through discussion. Another way that we have to both deepen our relationship as well as give something back to our community is through choosing a project either in church or the community to work on together as a group. Working on a group project is not only an opportunity to do some good for our community but can also help to keep our Web Weavers group energized and help to balance the inner focus of the program with some outward action.

How do I experience working in a group?

Is my energy best used inside the church or out in the community?

How much time am I willing to give to this project?

What projects or programs do I know of that I would like my labor to benefit at this time?

What project would I like to work on at this time?

Wrap – up --- Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: William Shakespeare
Be great in act, as you have been in thought.

Images of the Goddess

Source: unknown

Opening Words:

“There was a time when we were not [part of a male hierarchy], remember that. We walked along, full of laughter, we bathed bare bellied. We say you have lost all recollection of it, remember... you say there are no words to describe it, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent.” Adapted from Monique Witting, *Les Guerilleres*

Checking-in/Sharing

Topic:

The Unitarian Universalist curricula *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven* (1986) and *Rise Up and Call Her Name* (1994) have had a profound impact on Unitarian Universalism. Chants and reading of the Goddess and earth-based traditions are part of worship; the language is more inclusive, and there are special services honoring these traditions (Solstice, Equinox).

Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Kali, Innana are all words for the female divine from ancient cultures. Spider Woman, Kuan Yin, Mary, and the Earth as Mother are modern variations.

What is your relationship with female images of the divine?

Have these images influenced you or your spiritual practices?

Has your spiritual history affected your relationship to the female divine?

Likes & Wishes

Closing Words:

The Charge of the Goddess

“I who am the beauty of the green earth and the white moon among the stars and the mysteries of the waters, I call upon your soul to arise and come unto me. For I am the soul of nature that gives life to the universe. From me all things proceed and unto me they must return... And you seek to know me, know that your seeking and yearning will avail you not, unless you know the mystery; for if that which you seek, you find not within yourself, you will never find it without. For behold, I have been with you from the beginning, and I am that which is attained at the end of desire. Starhawk, *The Spiritual Dance*

The Environment

Web Weavers Discussion Guide Erich J. Richter
April 2009 UU Church of Spokane

Opening Words

God created man in his own image. In God's image he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them. God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

-- Genesis 1:27-28

Sharing Our Lives / Check-In

Discussion Topic

Human beings have become the predominant destructive force on Earth. With power of hands and minds amplified by machines, our impact exceeds that of great floods, hurricanes and earthquakes. The time has come when we can envisage the end of nature; the time has come to realize that we are able to destroy the Earth.

--Calvin B. DeWitt (co-founder of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), is a professor of environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. DeWitt is also the Director of the Au Sable Institute for Environmental Studies, a Christian environmental stewardship institute in Michigan. The Institute's mission is to "bring healing and wholeness to the biosphere and the whole of Creation." Rounding out DeWitt's credentials is his role as president of the Christian Environmental Council)

Most people are on the world, not in it--have no conscious sympathy or relationship to anything about them-- undiffused, separate, and rigidly alone like marbles of polished stone, touching, but separate.

--John Muir (1838-1914)

It seems clear at last that our love for the natural world—Nature—is the only means by which we can requite God's obvious love for it.

--Edward Abbey (1927-1989)

Questions:

1. As Unitarian Universalists how do we reconcile the words of God in Genesis with modern environmentalism?
2. How do you define and relate to "the environment"?
3. What can we do to help maintain and restore "nature", if that is indeed what needs done?

Wrap-Up / Comments / Likes & Wishes

Closing Words

But love of the wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth which bore us and sustains us, the only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need - if only we had eyes to see.

-- Edward Abby

The Great Winter Holidays

Web Weavers – Compiled by Susan Virnig UU Church of Spokane

Opening Words

We gather in the chill of winter solstice,
finding warmth from each other,
nourishing hope where reason fails.

Grateful for small miracles,
we rejoice in the wonder
of light and darkness
and the daring of hope.

Holy One of Blessing,
Your Presence fills creation.

– from Hanukkah Lights, Beth El Congregation, Sudbury, MA

Sharing our Lives – Check-in

Discussion Topic – two readings

Winter, Spring, Summer, Autumn – birth, growth, fading, death – the Wheel turns, on and on. Ideas are born, projects are consummated, plans prove impractical and die. We fall in love; we suffer loss; we consummate relationships; we give birth; we grow old; we decay.

The Sabbats are the eight points at which we connect the inner and the outer cycles: the interstices where the seasonal, the celestial, the communal, the creative and the personal all meet. As we enact each drama in its time, we transform ourselves. We are renewed, we are reborn even as we decay and die. We are not separate from each other, from the broader world around us; we are one with the Goddess, with the God. As the Cone of Power rises, as the season changes, we arouse the power from within, the power to heal, the power to change our society, the power to renew the earth.

– from The Spiral Dance, Starhawk

(continues next page)

When the song of angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the [siblings],
to make music in the heart.

– The Work of Christmas, Howard Thurman

Which of the great winter traditions speaks most deeply to you at this time?
How do you prepare for the holiday(s) that you celebrate?
How do you hold on to the deeper meaning in the midst of the season’s busyness?

Wrap-up Comments – Likes & Wishes

Closing Words

For so the children come
and so they have been coming.
Always in the same way they come,
born of the seed of man and woman.

No angels herald their beginnings.
No prophets predict their future courses.
No wisemen see a star to show where
to find the babe that will save humankind.

Yet each night a child is born is a holy night,
fathers and mothers –
sitting beside their children’s cribs
feel glory in the sight of a new life beginning.

They ask, “Where and how will this new life end?
Or will it ever end?”

Each night a child is born is a holy night –
a time for singing,
a time for wondering,
a time for worshipping.

– For So the Children Come, Sophia Lyon Fahs, UU Religious Educator

Creativity

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, Georgia, *Kay Giese*
November 4, 2011

CHALICE LIGHTING AND CENTERING

Opening Words:

“Sometimes you've got to let everything go - purge yourself. If you are unhappy with anything . . . whatever is bringing you down, get rid of it. Because you'll find that when you're free, your true creativity, your true self comes out.” -- *Tina Turner*

Check-in

Focus/Topic: *Creativity*

Pass around basket with printed quotes about creativity (attached) and have each participant read the quote they drew.

- Think of a time when you did something very creative, and please share that experience with the group. How did the experience make you feel?
- We all seem to admire people who are creative. Why is this?
- What is creativity? Is there a relationship between creativity and spirituality?
- What are the benefits – to you, to society -- of creative endeavors?

Likes & Wishes

How did this session go for you? Is there anything you'd like to call particular attention to?

Closing Words

There is no use trying,” said Alice. “One can’t believe impossible things.”
“I daresay you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” — **Lewis Carroll**

(continued next page)

Quotations about Creativity

“Creativity is piercing the mundane to find the marvelous.” -- **Bill Moyers**

“It is good taste, and good taste alone, that possesses the power to sterilize and is always the first handicap to any creative functioning”-- **Salvador Dalí**

“The highest prize we can receive for creative work is the joy of being creative. Creative effort spent for any other reason than the joy of being in that light filled space, love, god, whatever we want to call it, is lacking in integrity. . .” – **Marianne Williamson**

“Nobody cares if you can’t dance well. Just get up and dance. Great dancers are not great because of their technique, they are great because of their passion.” -- **Martha Graham**

“Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had and synthesize new things.” -- **Steve Jobs**

“Creativity often consists of merely turning up what is already there. Did you know that right and left shoes were thought up only a little more than a century ago?” -- **Bernice Fitz-Gibbon**

“Creativity is merely a plus name for regular activity. Any activity becomes creative when the doer cares about doing it right, or better.” -- **John Updike**

“Imagination is more important than knowledge. For while knowledge defines all we currently know and understand, imagination points to all we might yet discover and create.” -- **Albert Einstein**

“Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine and at last you create what you will.” -- **George Bernard Shaw**

“Don't think. Thinking is the enemy of creativity. It's self-conscious, and anything self-conscious is lousy. You can't try to do things. You simply must do things.”-- **Ray Bradbury**

Living in Community

Weavers Discussion Guide #1 From Rev Glenn Turner

Opening Words: Penny Hackett-Evans

Each of us brings a separate truth here,
We bring the truth of our own life, our own story.
We don't come as empty vessels ...
But rather we come as full people – people who have a story and our own truth.
We seek to add to our stories.
This room is rich with truth, rich with experience.
All manner of people are here:
needy... joyful... frightened... anxious... bored

We all bring our truth with us.
May we all recognize the truth and the story in everyone's life.
And may we hear and honor the truths that we all bring as we
gather together.
Together we have truths.
Together we have a story.
Together we are a community.

Sharing Our Lives - - - Check-in

Discussion Topic:

A community is made up of people who enjoy and are ready to participate in mutual helpfulness. Not that they are busybodies always prying into one another's affairs. They are not conscious "do-gooders," but they know how to be helpful without making a big thing of it.

How do we want to be in community?
How do we want others to be?
What do we experience as helpful?
What do you need to know about me;
And what do I need to know about you?

Wrap-up Comments - - - Likes & Wishes

Closing Words:

And now we take our leave.

Before we gather here again –
may each of us bring happiness into another's life;
may each be surprised by the gifts that surround us;
may we each be enlivened by constant curiosity;
and may we remain together in spirit
'til the hour we meet again.

Learning from Failure

Weavers Discussion Guide #2-a From Rev Glenn Turner

Opening Words: Adapted from Harold Babcock

We gather to affirm the potential we all share
for building community, for undertaking constructive change,
for engaging in mature growth,
for achieving greater humanity than we have known.
May our meeting together be a time of reflection on possibilities untried.
May it help us on our perilous ways during the week ahead.

Sharing Our Lives - - - Check-in

Discussion Topic:

“Whether or not we soften the sense of ‘sinners’ to what Eugene Kennedy calls ‘mistake makers’, the fact remains we are not and never can be perfect. This is not to say we are condemned to making the same mistakes over and over. If we learn from past mistakes, we shall have the joy and sorrow of making some entirely new ones and learning from them as well. That is learning. That is growth. That is what being alive is all about.”

What have we learned from our mistakes or failures?
How do we make imperfection a wise teacher?

Wrap-up Comments - - - Likes & Wishes

Closing Words:

We receive fragments of holiness, glimpses of eternity, brief moments of insight. Let us gather them up for the precious gifts that they are, and, renewed by their grace, move boldly into the unknown.

Learning from Failure

Weavers Discussion Guide #2-b Rev Margaret Keip
Adapted from Rev Glenn Turner

Opening Words: “Speech Stammers to Tell”, 100 Meditations, pg. 49
Raymond John Baughan, The Sound of Silence, 1965

Speech stammers to tell
of touch of stone, of love,
of ache inside,
or startle surprise.

Whatever at last is said
is spoken from
what is unsayable.

Sharing Our Lives - - - Check-in

Discussion Topic:

The word error comes from a Middle English word, *erren*, which means “to wander about,” as in the knight errant. The word evolved to mean “going astray” and that evolved to mean “mistake.”

The annals of scientific discovery are full of errors that opened new worlds: Bell was working on an apparatus to aid the deaf when he invented the phonograph. If a man can keep alert and imaginative, an error is a possibility, a chance at something new; to him, wandering and wondering are part of the same process, and he is most mistaken, most in error, whenever he quits exploring.

William Least Heat-Moon, Blue Highways, pp. 215 - 6

When “we learn from past mistakes, we shall have the joy and sorrow of making some entirely new ones and learning from them as well. That is learning. That is growth. That is what being alive is all about.” Glenn Turner

What have we learned from our mistakes or failures?
How do we make imperfection a wise teacher?

Wrap-up Comments - - - Likes & Wishes

Closing Words:

We receive fragments of holiness, glimpses of eternity, brief moments of insight. Let us gather them up for the precious gifts that they are, and, renewed by their grace, move boldly into the unknown.

Religious/Philosophical Timeline

Weavers Discussion Guide #3 From UU Community Church, Augusta, ME

Opening Words: “The Larger Circle” Wendell Berry
#646 Singing the Living Tradition, UU Hymnal

We clasp the hands of those that go before us,
And the hands of those who come after us.
We enter the little circle of each other’s arms
And the larger circle of lovers, whose hands are joined in a dance,
And the larger circle of all creatures,
Passing in and out of life, who move also in a dance,
To a music so subtle and vast that no ear hears it
Except in fragments.

Sharing Our Lives - - - Check-in

Discussion Topic

Create a religious or philosophical timeline. Divide a line into sections, one for each of your decades of life, plus the decades you expect to live. Draw pictures for each decade representing how you understood God, felt about religion or philosophy of life during each of those periods. Then do the same for how you hope to experience these in the decades to come (20 minutes). Then share.

(Materials: long paper & colored pencils)

Wrap-up Comments - - - Likes and Wishes

Closing Words: Wayne Arnason

Take courage friends.
The way is often hard, the path is never clear,
And the stakes are high.
Take courage.
For deep down, there is another truth.
You are not alone.

The Experience of Worship

Weavers Discussion Guide # 4UU Community Church of Augusta, ME

Opening Words: W. Waldemar W. Argow

Ancient as the home is the temple. Ancient as the workbench is the altar. Ancient as the soldier is the priest. Older than written language is spoken prayer; older than painting is the thought of the nameless one. Religion is first and last – the universal language of the human heart. Differing words describe the outward appearance of things; diverse symbols represent that which stands beyond and within. Yet each person's hunger is the same, and heart communicates with heart. Ever the vision leads on with many gods or with one, with a holy land washed by ocean waters, or a holy land within the heart. In temperament we differ, yet we are dedicated to one august destiny; creeds divide us, but we share a common destiny. Because we are human, we shall ever build our altars; because each has a holy yearning, we offer everywhere our prayers and anthems. For an eternal verity abides beneath diversities; we are children of one great love, united in our one eternal family.

Sharing our Lives - - - Check-in

Discussion Topic

What kinds of worship can you think of?
What is worship for?
Share an experience of memorable or moving worship.
What makes worship meaningful for you?
How do you prepare yourself for worship?

Wrap-up Comments - - - Likes and Wishes

Closing Words: Wayne Arnason

Take courage friends.
The way is often hard, the path is never clear,
And the stakes are high.
Take courage.
For deep down, there is another truth.
You are not alone.

Living Through Loss

Weavers Discussion Guide #5
UU Community Church of Augusta, ME

Opening Words: “The Sacred Hoop” by Black Elk
#614 Singing the Living Tradition UU Hymnal

Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all,
And round beneath me was the whole hoop of the world.
And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell
And I understood more than I saw.
For I was seeing in the sacred manner the shape of things of the spirit
And the shapes as they must live together like one being.
And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people
was one of the many hoops that make one circle,
wide as daylight and starlight,
And in the center grew one mighty flowering tree
To shelter all the children of one mother and one father.
And I saw that it was holy.

Sharing Our Lives - - - Check-in

Discussion Topic: Myrriah Osbourne, Mourning, 1989

I have journeyed to a place of great sorrow and there did I cry from the very depths of my soul. For days you thought I might never return, but I have come back to you: stronger, richer, with greater knowledge of myself. The crack in my heart will remain forever - - its purpose no longer to let grief out, but to let greater love in.

Share an experience of loss that has been a significant part of your life journey.
Was your journey a meandering route or a straight line?
Where were the dark places?
Where were you lonely?
Where did you have a companion?
How has it shaped you? Your faith?
What strength has it given you?

Wrap-up Comments - - - Likes and Wishes

Closing Words: Nancy Wood

Hold on to what is good, even if it is a handful of earth.
Hold on to what you believe even if it is a tree which stands by itself.
Hold on to what you must do even if it is a long way from here.
Hold on to my hand even when I have gone away from you.

Living Simply

Weavers Discussion Guide #7 UU Community Church, Augusta, ME

Opening Words: Henry David Thoreau

Why should we live in such a hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry. I wish to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life. I wish to learn what life has to teach, and not, when I come to die, discover that I have not lived. I do not wish to live what is not life, living is so dear, nor do I wish to practice resignation, unless it is quite necessary. I wish to love deep and suck out all the marrow of life. I want to cut a broad swath, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms. If it proves to be mean, then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or it is sublime, to know it by experience, and to be able to give a true account of it.

Sharing Our Lives Roundtable

Discussion Topic: (materials: pen and paper)

Many of us would like to live more simply, to simplify our lives. But not many of us are likely to follow Thoreau's example and build a cabin in the woods. Take ten minutes to answer these questions, then take time to share.

What are the demands in my life that keep me too busy?

What needs or forces in me keep me busy?

What do I push aside?

What would I be willing to give up?

What one thing are you willing to try in the next weeks

(until the group meets again)

that will move your life closer to your goals for a simpler and more meaningful life?

Wrap-up Comments - - - Likes and Wishes

Closing Words: Kathleen McTigue

May the light around us guide our footsteps, and hold us fast to the best and most righteous vision that we seek. May the darkness around us nurture our dreams, and give us rest so that we may give ourselves to the work of the world. Let us seek to remember the wholeness of our lives, the weaving of light and shadow in this great and astonishing dance in which we move.

What We Love

Weavers Discussion Guide #8 UU Community Church, Augusta, ME

Opening Words: “Wild Geese” by Mary Oliver
#490 UU Hymnal Singing the Living Tradition

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes, over the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like wild geese, harsh and exciting – over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

Sharing Our Lives Check-in

Discussion Topic

May Oliver says, “You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.” What do you love? Tell a story of when you first encountered one of your loves. How does it feel: doing or being with the thing you love? How do you feel when you are apart from it or unable to do it? Are you at peace with the things that you love to do or be? What would you have to do to “let” yourself love what you love? How could we help each other achieve that?

Wrap-up Comments - - - Likes and Wishes

Closing Words: Richard S. Gilbert

As we leave this community of the spirit, may we remember the difficult lesson that each day offers more things than we can do. May we do what needs to be done, postpone what does not, and be at peace with what we can be and do. Therefore, may we learn to separate that which matters most from that which matters least of all.

The Sense of Gratitude

Weavers Discussion Guide #9
From materials adapted by the Rev. Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: adapted from Kenneth Patton, Hymns for the Celebration of Life

Who can make an accounting of gratitude?
For the universe we give thanks, an expanse of life to stretch us with wonder...
For the earth we give thanks, fragment of the stars that is our home...
For life we give thanks, the burning of stars ordered and tempered here allowing us life and
breath ...
For growth we give thanks, for heritage of the spirit, for all the forces past our knowing,
power cast our control...
For the ages which follow us, for the eternity of days, in which life is ever renewed and
fulfilled, we give thanks.

Sharing our Lives Roundtable

Discussion Topic

There are things in life that just sort of hang there: like free floating guilt and angst. But, what about a sense of gratitude? Doesn't that well up at times and demand expression? A blessing, a song of praise, a shout, a loud HURRAH! I'm talking about a sense of gratitude that goes beyond just what another person does for you. I'm talking about the fiery sunset, the smell of the rose, the very existence of the artichoke and the giraffe. It should take our breath away. And our breath, oxygen – yes, thank you!

How do you cultivate a thankful heart?
How do we stay aware of that in Life which is sheer blessing?
What is a healthy response to ungratefulness in others?

Wrap-up Comments - - - Likes and Wishes

Closing Words: Richard F. Boeke

God,
May our ears be open to little birds who are the secret of living,
May we take time to see flowers and people for the beauty they are,
May we make room in our lives for one another.

or - - - unknown ancient scholar, A Grateful Heart, M. J. Ryan, editor

From cowardice that shrinks from new truth,
From laziness that is content with half-truths,
From arrogance that thinks it knows all truth,
O God of Truth, deliver us.

Preparing for Christmas

Weavers Group Discussion #10 From Rev Glenn Turner

Opening Words: “The Work of Christmas,” by Howard Thurman, UU Hymnal, #615
Singing the Living Tradition

When the song of angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner, to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the brothers, to make music in the heart.

Sharing Our Lives - - - Check-in

Discussion Topic: Rev Glenn Turner (use following as a responsive reading)

The relatives have gone. The harvest season passed with Thanksgiving. Even as we bought turkey, the Salvation Army bells jangled our nerves toward Christmas.

The decorations of Christmas are hung in our towns and cities. We have left-over turkey soup and _____ more shopping days till Christmas.

This is the advent of peace and goodwill, songs to be sung, choirs to do their Messiahs. There will be Christmas Teas and office parties, Christmas Fairs, and hot rum toddies.

By this week we should have our cards in the mail, greetings to a hundred friends all over the world, each letter telling all that we did for the year. Last week our packages should have been mailed. When is there time to go shopping?

Giving gifts takes more time than we have. Sitting in the endless traffic, hustling and bustling through the stores, lining up in the Post Office behind the man with six packages all going overseas, all to be insured, all to be registered.

Soon we'll be eating and drinking more than we should. Anxious, uneasy, we may miss the spirit we seek. We pause, center down, and reflect on the meaning of Christmas.

What shall we celebrate? A closeness with family and friends, a warmth in the chill of winter, a birth – what shall we celebrate?

The Yule log, the feasting, the gifts – the cards, the trees, and the wreaths all point to our feelings of closeness, declare our need for a caring community.

The winter is cold, the snow will lie on the ground, soon are the snowmen and skating, hot chocolate, skiing, and singing – all that this season is bringing.

There must be space for the singing of angels, bright lights of beauty and meaning. There must be a place under the stars to chart a course that is ours to our own Bethlehems.

Some questions to ask:

What are you feeling as we move into another Christmas season?

What do you dread? What do you look forward to?

What rituals keep you focused?

If your current tradition is not Christian, how do you experience this season?

Wrap-up Comments - - - Likes & Wishes

Closing Words: Sara Moores Campbell

Give us a child's heart, that we may be filled with wonder and delight.

The Experience of Prayer

Weavers Discussion Guide #11 From UU Community Church of Augusta, ME

Opening Words:

Spirit of life and love, that lives in us and in all people, be present with us this day. Help us to be grateful for all that we have, grateful for this time of connection, grateful for these friends, and for all who enrich our lives. Spirit of life, be present with us as compassion, that we may open our hearts, listen with care, and be truly present with one another. Spirit of life, be present with us as a generosity of spirit, that we may meet the world with goodwill. Be present with us as a vision, so that we may see beyond this moment and beyond the limits of our own day to day concerns, and remember, once again, that we are a part of a larger world, and all that lives therein. Amen.

Sharing Our Lives Check-in

Discussion Topic:

Human prayer is as old as the oldest evidence we have of human activity. Prayers come in many different forms: communal, personal, ritual, civic, petitionary (other?). And we come with different experiences, different expectations, different attitudes toward prayer. Share your understanding of prayer, the experiences which have gone into that understanding, and if you have a prayer practice, what that is like, or if you were to begin a prayer practice, what you imagine that might be like.

Wrap-up Comments - - - Likes and Wishes

Closing Words:

As we leave this place and this company, may the fellowship of this circle carry us forward, remind us of that which we hold to be most sacred and encourage us in every hour, until such time as we meet again. Amen.

Personal Courage

Weavers Discussion Guide #12
Adapted from materials prepared by Rev Jane Bramadat

Opening Words: Dorothy Day
Chop Wood, Carry Water by Rick Fields, et al

The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us.

Sharing our Lives Check-in

Discussion Topic:

What do you consider to be courageous?
Are you able to be courageous?
Have you observed courage in others?

Discuss any of the above questions and/or respond to the following statements:

Courage is the conquest of fear, not the absence of it.
Rev. A. Powell Davies, Quotations from the Wayside
Edited by Brenda Wong, Skinner House Books, 1999

The pursuit of truth is a form of courage.
George Santayana, also from Quotations, Wong.

Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.
Anais Nin, The Beacon Book of Quotations by Women,
Edited by Rosalie Maggio, 1992

To die for the revolution is a one-shot deal; to live for the revolution means taking on the more difficult commitment of changing our day-to-day life patterns.
Frances M. Beal (American civil rights activist)
The Quotable Woman, edited by Elaine Partnow, 1977.

Wrap-up Comments - - - Likes and Wishes

Closing Words: Dr. Martin Luther King

I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality.

Changes

SGM Topic – Andi Richter UU Church of Spokane

Sharing Our / Lives Check in **Mind Body & Soul**

Opening Words:

Changes by Ethan Allen

A change in time, a change in place
A change of jobs, a change of pace
change your style or change your friends
change your path and change the end
Change for a 20, change for a 10
Change for the bus, 'Change please, friend'
A change of homes, a change of kin
A change of friends you never win
a change of schools, begin again
A change of age, a change of space
A change of morals, A change of rules
A change of sails, blowing you into the unknown

Discussion Topic:

Reflect on the following quotations about Change:

“All great changes are preceded by chaos.” -Deepak Chopra

“Getting over a painful experience is much like crossing monkey bars. You have to let go at some point in order to move forward.” -C.S. Lewis

“If work were so pleasant, the rich would keep it for themselves.” -Mark Twain

“The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man.” -George Bernard Shaw

Wrap – up Comments --- Likes and Wishes

Closing Words:

“20 years from now you will more be disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.” -Mark Twain

Additional Discussion Topics from Successful Groups

(to which you may add your own selected opening and closing readings)

Connectedness

After a UU Church service, a member, while shaking the Minister's hand, referred to a particularly brutal crime that was being reported in the media, suggesting that the perpetrator be severely punished. The Minister paused, still holding the member hand, then said: "I am that person" What did the Minister mean?

How might this relate to our military presence in the Middle-East? To Abu Grahib? To those in our prisons?

What new pathway towards violence might result in fewer theater/mall/school mass shootings in our communities?

Self Awareness

Sense of self typically undergoes a number of transformations during ones lifetime: that of childhood (dependency), youth (mixed independence/rebellion and conformity), adulthood (achievement/responsibility), and maturity (with the wisdom of experience).

What was your earliest sense of self?

In what transition(s) for you were the most challenging?

What do you know now that would have liked to have known sooner?

What do you still need to do to feel that your life has been fulfilled?

Personal Spirituality

Religious experiences are often thrust upon us (or not) at an early age. They may sustain us and develop, or may wane and become rejected.

Describe your religious/spiritual pathway. How it has it led to your current beliefs?

Was rebellion and rejection part of your spiritual growth?

When did you discover that "you were/are a Unitarian"?

Can you draw a religious timeline for yourself? Where are you on it now?

What do you expect that your end of life experience will be?

Nature and Being

It has been said that God is in a grain of sand as well as in the Heavens; in the gnat as well as in the human being. In this sense, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust" can be seen as a statement of eternal existence. Sciences' quest that resulted in atomic bombs may also bring us the "God particle", i.e the ultimate source of all things.

Has viewing the night sky or thinking about the cosmos affected you?

What other experience of nature brings you closer to your spiritual self?

How might a retreat, alone into a natural place, help you grow spiritually?

How might you live differently if your saw your relationship with your world as one of stewardship rather than ownership?

Ability and Disability

Advocates for the disabled remind us that we are all "temporarily abled."

Have you ever had a disability - temporary or permanent - that presented you with a spiritual challenge? How did you handle it?

How does your physical being affect your spiritual well-being? Do you have physical rituals or spiritual practices that you find beneficial during times of stress?

How do you feel and act when you encounter a physically disabled person? Does it differ when compared with economically disabled? When compared with alcohol or drug-addiction disabled?

What does your shared belief in the "inherent worth and dignity of every human being" call you to do in such a situation?

Gender Differences

It's been said that we would move closer to World Peace if women were in charge. Nonetheless, Margaret Thatcher, Indira Ghandi, and Golda Meier struggled with the same kinds of conflicts as their male counterparts.

How have you been served, as well as dis-served, by patriarchy?

How important are gender-assigned roles in raising children?

What can you learn from gender-equality in marriage?

Given the advances in in-vitro fertilization, will men be as necessary in our world of the future? If so, how might their role in relationships change?

If your SGM creates a new topic, please send it to an SGM Steering & Resource Committee person so that it can be posted to our website and other SGMs may use it. Thank you!

Other sources for topics for SGM meetings

1. Eugene, Oregon UU church website: <http://www.uueugene.org/small-group-ministry-sgm>
2. UUA SGM site: <http://www.smallgroupministry.net/public/sessions/index.html>
3. Create them yourself!
 - a. Please type them up in standard format
 - b. Please submit them electronically to the SGM team for inclusion in the next manual
4. On the UUUCS website: uuspokane.org (this will be up and running at some point)

All of these topics are on the UUUCS website – uuspokane.org – so that you may search them or refer your SGM to upcoming topics (some people like to read ahead).

SGM at UUUCS falls under the auspices of the Adult Enrichment Team.