

Chalice Circles: Small Groups on a Spiritual Journey

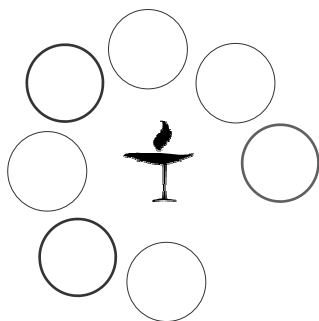
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

UUSMC is offering *Chalice Circles*, a program designed to augment and strengthen the shared experiences of our congregational life. *Chalice Circles* provide a safe and confidential environment where people are encouraged and supported in the sharing of stories, experiences, ideas and feelings to develop spiritually and build community.

What is a *Chalice Circle*?

Chalice Circles is a form of “small group ministry” where groups of 8-10 people **covenant** to meet together on a regular basis for the express purposes of:

- Forming deeper, more intimate relationships
- Sharing spiritual struggles and growth
- Deepening religious commitment
- Ministering to each other
- Supporting each other
- Learning from each other
- Finding one's spiritual voice



Why *Chalice Circles*?

In addition to Sunday worship services, a vibrant and vital religious community provides avenues for:

Community – Connection with one another to deepen relationships.

Learning – Spiritual growth, knowing oneself better, pondering the age-old questions of faith—how to live, what to believe, how to act, exploring the mystery of life.

Service – A life of faith is a life of service; being of use to the congregation and larger world.

Chalice Circles do the above by fostering community, learning, spirituality, and service all in one program.

Will everyone be expected to join a *Chalice Circle*?

Chalice Circles work for some and do not work for others. Joining a *Chalice Circle* is an individual decision. Key to the *Chalice Circle* experience is having a clear expectation of what the group is and is not. A *Chalice Circle* is:

- Supportive and yet not a support group or therapy;
- Not a formal class and yet is an opportunity to learn from peers;
- Reverent and yet is not a formal worship experience;
- Not a social club and is still an opportunity to make and deepen friendships; and
- Not pastoral care as provided by the minister and/or lay ministers and yet it is caring.

What happens in a *Chalice Circle*?

Trained facilitators guide conversations using the following format:

- *Opening Words* – Inspirational reading related to the session topic begin each session, along with a chalice or candle lighting.
- *Check-In* – Time for each person to share how/where they are at that moment or what has been happening in their lives.
- *Topic/Discussion* – A paragraph or two introduces the topic and presents questions that will elicit thoughtful discussion and reflection.
- *Likes and Wishes* – A format for reflecting on the session; a time to share parting thoughts.
- *Closing Words or Ritual* – A reading or ritual that brings the formal session to an end.

What is expected of *Chalice Circle* participants?

Participants are expected to bring a positive attitude and a willingness to share and to learn. Another expectation is that participants give the agreed upon meetings a high priority. While no one can make every meeting, participants are expected to make every effort to attend.

What is a *covenant*?

There are three aspects to a *Chalice Circle* **covenant** or agreement.

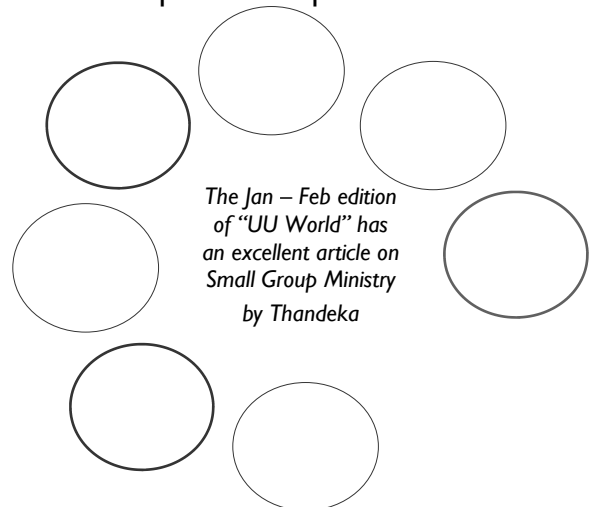
- The first is the **logistical and behavioral** element that addresses how group members will be with each other (i.e., not interrupting, seeking to understand those with different opinions, asking questions to enhance

understanding, listening before speaking, keeping what is said within the group, etc.). Each member of the group agrees to abide by the covenant.

- The second is a covenant or agreement with the **congregation**. That is, whatever the group does, it remains part of the congregation, abides by Unitarian Universalist Principles, and works for the benefit of the congregation.
- The third aspect of the covenant is **service to the congregation and the larger community** through specific service projects (i.e., group sponsors coffee hour for a month, does a project for children's religious education, volunteers at a homeless shelter for one day, works with Social Concerns Committee on a community project, etc.).

Why do *congregational* and *community* service projects?

Service beyond the group is important for two reasons. First, it helps to offset the natural tendency of small groups to become self absorbed and disconnected, and second, because a necessary aspect of a growing spiritual life, a life of faith, is service. Service is one of many ways the UU Principles can be put into action.



What do we mean by *spirituality*?

Spirituality is exploring the relationship of the individual to the universe, experiencing the spiritual in all aspects of life. In a *Chalice Circle*, group members will learn from each other as they enhance and share their spiritual journey, as they define it.

What is the time *commitment*?

Chalice Circles do require a personal commitment to the process for it to be a meaningful experience. *Chalice Circles* meet for two hours on a regular basis. Groups are encouraged to meet for a minimum of eight times. Groups will decide on the duration and frequency of meetings as they form their covenants. Some groups may covenant to meet once or twice a month for a year; others may meet twice a month for four-six months. The groups will decide how they want to handle the summer months possibly meeting less frequently in the summer. Regardless of the duration, groups will have a chance to revise their covenants at the end of the time set by the group.

How are *Chalice Circles* different from other activities at UUSMC?

Chalice Circles are not committee meetings, not adult RE classes, or Circle Dinners. *Chalice Circles'* goals and activities are unique. The elements of the structure provide ritual and a set sequence of activities to nurture each other's spiritual journey. The consistent format gives stability and predictability for the participants so they know what to expect at each meeting. *Chalice Circles* (Small Group Ministry) represents a different level of commitment. There's a **covenant** to create a sacred space where people are encouraged and supported in the sharing of stories, experiences, ideas and feelings to develop spiritually.

How are *Chalice Circles* different from "Lay Ministry?"

The minister has trained a team of Lay Ministers to assist in the provision of *individual* pastoral care, follow-up, and support. *Chalice Circles* are small groups of 8 – 10 people covenanting to meet on a regular basis for *spiritual* development, personal insight, and community building.

Do you have to be a member of UUSMC to join?

No, you do not have to be a UUSMC member to join a *Chalice Circle*. Members and friends are encouraged to participate.

How and when will groups be formed?

Groups will be formed based on time slot availability. When completing a *Chalice Circle* registration form individuals will indicate the times they are available to be in a group. Registration for *Chalice Circles* will be ongoing starting April 3. Groups will be formed when there are at least four people who can meet at the same time and a facilitator is available.

Who is in charge of *Chalice Circles*?

The minister and the *Chalice Circle* Steering Committee are responsible for the implementation and oversight of *Chalice Circles*, including the recruitment and training of group facilitators.

Chalice Circle Steering Committee:

Janet Tillman (Chair), Rev. Nancy Dean, Ann Davis, Allan Cairncross, Jerry Bilton, and MQ Riding
For additional information contact any member of the committee or use the chalicecircles@uusmc.org email.