

Building Sacred Ground

Building Sacred Ground is an experiential 4-session group that helps participants explore Unitarian Universalism more deeply, build a personal foundation of faith, and get to know a small group of people very well. For the new congregant, this group should help them decide if this congregation is the “right place” for them, and, if so, encourage them to become a formal member of this church. For the established member, this series is a great way to become re-acquainted with the over 60 church groups and activities and get to know a small group of people very well. This series covers our historical and theological roots as Unitarian Universalists, involves sharing individual spirituality journeys, learning how and where to volunteer within the church and ends with a private tea with the ministers where people have a chance to visit and socialize. The program was designed by Suzette Southfox, Director of Membership and Development. It has been successfully presented approximately twice a year since April, 2009.

Building Sacred Ground Session 1: UU 101

Distribute blank 3X5 index cards at the start of the session. Let the group know that as each session unfolds, if they come up with a question they would like to have one of the ministers respond to, jot down the question. At the start of each session these blank cards will be distributed and collected at the end of the session. They will be given to the ministers at the last session to serve as the starting point of the conversation over tea. Questions can be related to the topic at hand, this church, this faith, membership or the congregation or any matter they would like to have a minister address.

Building Sacred Ground starts with UU101, touching on the historical and theological roots. UU 101 is offered through our Adult Religious Education Program and can be taken independently of the Building Sacred Ground Class. For those that are interested in taking the Building Sacred Ground Series all four sessions must be attended.

This version of UU101 was designed and facilitated by the current Intern Minister, Sue Magdison. It covers our history, the merger of Unitarianism and Universalism, well known personalities, great moments in history and the basic theological underpinnings of our faith.

As folks come in, these three questions were on butcher paper:

- *What drew you to this evening's class?*
- *What one question would you like answered this evening?*
- *What draws you to UUism today?*

Participants were invited to write their answers on butcher paper and then share them with someone they didn't know.

Outline of two-hour class:

- Chalice lighting #434
- Welcome and introductions
 - Go around and say name and short phrase describing your current relationship to UUism (e.g. questioning, new UU, been around a while, lifer, etc.)
 - Read responses on butcher paper aloud and respond briefly (i.e. "we'll talk about that later," "that's a great question," we won't get to this tonight, but I'd be happy to answer it one-one.")
- Sharing my story of living UUism
- Singing
 - Take-off on #1003 (*Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? Where do we come from? History, history, we can learn a lot from UU history*)
- Uni- what??!! (Brief history of Unitarianism, Universalism, and how they got together.)
- Principles and sources
 - Posters of principles and sources (adult and kid versions, if possible)
 - Read principles aloud.
 - Discussion: what did you notice?
 - Brief history of principles and sources
 - Pointers to Skinner House books on Principles
- What *do* most UUs believe?
 - Ask participants (ours did a great job with this – they really wanted to focus on the positive, rather than the negative)
- Singing
 - Sing song from Chalice Camp by Laila Ibrahim: (*It's a blessing we were born and it matters what we do. What we know about God is a piece of the truth. Let the beauty we love be what we do, and we don't have to do it alone.*)
- Hymnal tour
 - Gray hymnals (1993)
 - Principles and sources (opening pages)

- Open up anywhere near the beginning or middle – bottom of page – hymns organized thematically
 - Turn to p. 669 to see more complete topical list where hymns can be listed in multiple categories – helpful if you’re leading worship or even a class or meeting and you want a song.
 - Turn to p. 682 – index by first lines and titles
 - Turn to #415 – last song – beginning of readings, also organized thematically. Page through this back section when you have a chance– will give you a sense of what lived UUism looks like – diversity of sources and ideas. You also might find some readings for a meeting (opening words, chalice lightings, closing words)
 - Turn to p. 654 (composers, arrangers, authors, translators, and sources). Take a minute to scan through these pages. Each person names one name that you were surprised and/or happy to see listed.
 - Teal hymnals (2005)
 - Spanish hymnals
 - Childrens hymnal
- UU history timeline and very brief history
 - What the heck is congregational polity?
 - The story of the flaming chalice
 - (If time, try writing elevator speeches)
 - Sing “Spirit of Life”
 - Chalice extinguishing

Building Sacred Ground Session 2: Sharing Our Journeys

Distribute blank 3X5 index cards at the start of the session. Let the group know that as each session unfolds, if they come up with a question they would like to have one of the ministers respond to, jot down the question. At the start of each session these blank cards will be distributed and collected at the end of the session. They will be given to the ministers at the last session to serve as the starting point of the conversation over tea. Questions can be related to the topic at hand, this church, this faith, membership or the congregation or any matter they would like to have a minister address.

The purpose of this session is to build community and personal connections between group participants. The following three activities are created to help participated look at their spiritual lives, spiritual development and future spiritual explorations.

1. Building Sacred Ground Session Two, Activity One: Sharing our Spiritual Lives: Continuum

Supplies needed:

1. 3X5 index cards or large “stickies” (100 - 150)
2. Blue tape
3. Sharpie marking pens
4. Printed signs saying: *birth, childhood, adolescence, teenage, young adulthood, adulthood, elderhood*

Activity:

Hand out large “stickies” & marking pens with instructions to write out significant spiritual events or experiences in their life. Have a timeline (visually taped) on the wall – Give about 10 minutes for people to write down their cards and tape it to the area that reflects the time in their lives the activity / event occurred. No names are to be attached to the events.

After everyone has posted their events, have the group walk through the continuum to read all the cards.

Call the group back with a chime. Then lead the conversation with these guiding questions.

1. What was it like at the beginning of this exercise to come up with an event or experience to share?
2. What was it like, walking the continuum and reading other people’s events and experiences?
3. Did anything surprise you?
4. Did anything make you remember something you did not include?
5. What did you learn about yourself?
6. What did you learn about this group?
7. What did you learn about your spiritual life?

2. Building Sacred Ground Session Two, Activity Two: Sharing our Spiritual States of Being: Snapshot

Supplies needed:

1. Box of 30 to 40 small objects of various symbolic relevance (statues, shells, rocks, tools, toys, etc)
2. Solid color table cloth and table to display the objects
3. Sheet or cover to place over the objects.
4. Instrumental music & player (CD)

Activity:

Before the class begins, place a solid color table cloth on a long table and arrange the objects on top. Then cover the whole thing with a sheet or other cover up so the items cannot be seen.

Introduce the activity as an opportunity to discern your current spiritual state of being. Knowing that where each of us is today is the result of the path we've traveled in our spiritual histories. Ask people to reflect on their current state of spirituality – their individual expressions, practices, ways of being. The “today” for some may change tomorrow. It is a fluid state of being, one that can sometimes be shared through words, emotions, music, pictures or experiences. Uncover the objects on the table and ask the group to choose one object that most closely represents their current spiritual state of being. Have the music playing and give them 5 minutes to move around the table and find an item.

Ring the bell at 5 minutes or when everyone has chosen an object. Then have the group share briefly about why they chose what they did.

**3. Building Sacred Ground Session Two, Activity Three:
Sharing Inspiration: The Dinner Party**

Supplies needed:

1. Paper, pens or pencils

Activity:

Ask the group to count off by 4 or “*hearts, moons, stars, clovers*” and have them gather into these 4 groups.

Once in their groups, ask everyone to reflect on one person who represents a spiritual role model or person of religious or spiritual significance for them. This person can be a living or non-living person, a family member, a teacher or historical figure. Also ask the group to attribute at least one reason why they chose this person. Give them no more than 5 minutes to write down some names.

Once the groups have identified their role models, have them share and record the list, asking one person in the group to write down the names and the attributes. Also write down the names of the people in the group. After this list is compiled, explain to the class that each group is hosting a fantasy dinner party. They now have about 5 minutes to choose a menu and a place where this party will happen, and one question they would have every guest answer. Ask the group to choose one person to share their guest list, their menu, location and question to the larger group.

Have each group share.

Call the group back with a chime. Ask the group to come back to a large circle and have each group share.

After each group shares, lead the conversation with these guiding questions.

1. What was the process of thinking up a spiritual mentor like for you?
2. What was it like hearing the names and attributes of other people in your group?
3. Did anything shift in your mind when you realized – for the purpose of this exercise - you would have a chance to have dinner and actually speak with these people?
4. What was it like hearing other groups share?
5. What were the similarities? Differences?
6. How might invoking such an array of spiritual mentors impact your future spiritual development?

Building Sacred Ground Session 3: Getting Involved

Distribute blank 3X5 index cards at the start of the session. Let the group know that as each session unfolds, if they come up with a question they would like to have one of the ministers respond to, jot down the question. At the start of each session these blank cards will be distributed and collected at the end of the session. They will be given to the ministers at the last session to serve as the starting point of the conversation over tea. Questions can be related to the topic at hand, this church, this faith, membership or the congregation or any matter they would like to have a minister address.

The purpose of this session is to gain a sense of personal gifts and to find ways to engage in the broader community. Also, personal connections between group participants will continue to be established and encouraged. The following three activities are created to help participated look at their spiritual lives, spiritual development and future spiritual explorations.

1. Building Sacred Ground Session Three, Activity One: Treasure: Moments of Meaning

Time, Talent &

Supplies needed:

- Index cards, pens
- Flip chart or dry erase

Activity:

Have each person take 3 index cards and a pen.

Ask the group to think about a time they were engaged in an activity that was incredibly rewarding. It could be a paid (work) or non-paid (volunteer) activity. It could be a one time activity or an ongoing experience, from long ago or very recent.

Write down the activity.

Now ask the group to think about an activity or action they are very good at or skilled at AND (hopefully) OR something that they love to do. Write down the activity.

Lastly, ask the group if they were completely unconcerned with generating income, what would be one way they spent their time? Write down the activity.

Why did we do this? Churches often talk about “Time, Talent & Treasure” as a way to discuss giving or volunteer time, volunteer skills and financial support. It’s important to identify the areas of possible involvement to find a good match where both the church and the congregant benefit.

Invite people to share round robin, from one to three of the activities written down on index cards.

Potentially, these may be volunteer areas where individuals can find meaning and ministry within the church. And what areas of the church would such activities be found? In our Ministry Teams, of course.

2. Building Sacred Ground Session Three, Activity Two:

Ministry Teams: Infomercials

@ Ministry Team leader gets 5 minutes for an infomercial. Time it. Make individual introductions and encourage relationships, conversation and insight sharing.

3. Building Sacred Ground Session Three, Activity Three:

JEOPARDY! Our Ministry Teams

Supplies needed:

- Pre-set jeopardy board, chocolate kisses or other give away candy, pastoral ER cards

Activity:

To introduce the seven ministry teams to the groups, through a two to three team “Jeopardy” competition.

1. *Caring*
2. *Community Life*
3. *Denominational Affairs*
4. *Generosity*
5. *Lifespan Religious Education and Learning*
6. *Social Action*
7. *South Bay*
8. *Worship & Program*

Building Sacred Ground Session 4: Potluck or Tea with the Ministers

The purpose of this session is to give the participants a time to share casual social time with the ministers in an intimate setting. The following guide is a suggestion to get conversations started.

(Make sure the questions from the cards that were distributed and collected during the first three sessions have been given to the ministers before this meeting. The cards themselves will be used during this session.)

Make sure that the tables are set up to facilitate face to face conversations with the whole group – open squares work best. Table clothes and candles are a nice touch for decorations but not required. Table tents with their names are also a wonderful touch.

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1. Ice Breaker Introductions: Ask everyone to introduce themselves, and share one thing about themselves you couldn’t tell by looking at them.
 2. Introductions: The Ministers
Ask each minister to introduce themselves, their connection to First UU Church.
 3. Make sure that you have given the ministers a pre-written and copied list of the Ask-A-Minister Cards that were gathered at previous sessions. At this point, bring the cards out and introduce the questions one at a time, and ask each minister to answer them.
 4. If there is a lull in the conversation, you may ask leading questions of the ministers or give them an opportunity to share their suggestions for building connections in the congregation.

QUESTIONS (sample of questions collected)

1. Why can't we just say we accept "everyone" rather than the long list we recite (faiths, colors, sexual orientation, family structure etc.) because having a list implies there are people who are not on the list.
2. Buddhism: why is it so important in this congregation?
3. We say we are "creed-less" but then we recite an "affirmation" at each service. This feels like an "oath" to me and I have never been comfortable saying it, even though I believe the words.
4. Why have so few people heard of UU?
5. What is Chalica and WHY?
6. How do we use other religious beliefs or rituals without "appropriating" them? Like lighting Hanukkah candles etc?
7. How do UUs develop spirituality?