Seven Small Group Sessions on the Seven UU Principles
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UU Principles: Session One

We affirm and Promote: The Inherent Worth and Dignity of Every Person

Opening Reading:

Blessing, by Barbara Pescan

We spend so much time running from ourselves
Fleeing from what we know
About the goodness in our hearts
We think we can escape
The intelligence of our loving.

Imagine
You are standing before a bodhisattva—
Jesus, Buddha, the first mother
It does not matter what you call the holy one—
He has dust on his shoes
Chaff clings to her
The smells of being alive—
Shining from their faces is the beam of all their questions
The compassion of their living.

Can you see yourself through those eyes?
Can we know each other like this?
(We, who no longer believe in messiahs
Can hardly believe in each other.)

Can we
Know ourselves seen
And know each other this same way
Until our restless hearts
Learn to abide
In this knowing and this love?
Can we live in this gaze of blessing?

Check in (explain confidentiality/anonymity, no cross talk)

Discussion Questions:

The Hindu greeting, ‘Namaste,’ means “that which is holy in me greets that which is holy in you.” What does it look like when we treat one another with not just respect, but reverence?
When have you felt as if you were valued, seen and heard? When have you felt as if you weren’t?

What are the forces in today’s society that de-personalize people? How does small group ministry answer those forces?

What can we do to facilitate moments of grace?

**Sample Covenants: and discussion…**

**Check-out: Likes and Wishes**

**Closing Reading: May Sarton**

Help us to be the always hopeful
Gardeners of the spirit
Who know that without darkness
Nothing comes to birth
As without light
Nothing flowers.
UU Principles: Session Two

We affirm and Promote: Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations

Opening Reading:

My Word, by Edward A. Frost

I love those who are angry with me
Because they care deeply about something
They feel I may have hurt.
I love those who criticize me
Because they need something they think I can give.
I love “wifty” people
Because their minds are usually in a nicer place
Than where we think we really are.
I love shy people
Because they are more like me, really,
Than the blustery and self-assured
Whom I love because I know how they really feel.
I love the know-it-alls
Because they know they don’t know what is really important.
I love those who talk too much
Because I know how much they fear the silence
And I love the quiet ones
Because they are usually listening.
I love those who love me—in spite of what they know.

Check in

Discussion Questions:

Last time, we came up against the dilemma of how to treat people who act in a mean-spirited way with reverence. Let’s go a little deeper, then, and talk about how to be accepting and loving of everyone—including people who are less than accepting and loving themselves—without losing the sense of safety that’s so essential to being open and honest.

Do you know anyone who’s really good at setting healthy boundaries in a loving way? What were their “tricks of the trade”?

Entertain the possibility that when people attack, the underlying feelings are fear and loneliness. In the past, being cantankerous is what has earned them attention. What are your habitual ways of being?

Let’s talk about “behavioral covenants”...pluses and minuses.
Sample Covenants: and discussion...

Check-out: Likes and Wishes

Closing Reading: Ralph Waldo Emerson

We have a great deal more kindness than is ever spoken.
The whole human family is bathed with an element of love like a fine ether.
How many person we meet in houses, who we scarcely speak to, whom yet we honor and who honor us?
How many we see in the street, or sit with in church, whom though silently, we warmly rejoice to be with?
Read the language of these wandering eye-beams.
The heart knoweth.
**UU Principles: Session Three**

We affirm and Promote: Acceptance of One Another and Encouragement to Spiritual Growth in our Congregations

**Opening Reading:**

Contact, by Gordon McKeeman

I stretch forth my hand
Knowing not what I shall touch…
   A tender spot,
   An open wound,
   Warmth,
   Pulsing life,
   Fragile blossoms,
   A rock,
   Ice.

I am tentative, trembling…
Wishing to avoid hurt,
Wanting to link my life with Life.
   Lonely, I desire companions.
   Naked, I long for defenders.
   Lost, I want to find…
   To be found.
Will I touch strangers
   Or enemies
   Or nothing?

My hand is withdrawn
But still it touches
   My vulnerable skin, my furrowed brow,
   My empty pocket, my full heart.
   Do others reach, tremble, withdraw?
   Do they desire, long, seek?
   Are they lonely, fearful, lost?
   Will they grasp a tentative, trembling hand?

I stretch forth my hand
Knowing now what I shall touch…
But hoping…

**Check in**
Discussion Questions:

It takes courage to reach out, to enter into relationship with strangers. It takes even more courage to open up, to share what is beneath the surface. Can you remember a time and a place when you were able to do this?

When did this congregation start to feel like your spiritual home?

Describe an experience when you felt nurtured and encouraged on your spiritual journey.

What is it that you most want this group to know about you?

Check-out: Likes and Wishes

Closing Reading: Loneliness and Love, by Dick Gilbert

Loneliness is our common fate.
There is no escape.
But out of that loneliness comes our salvation,
For we love out of our fear of being alone.
As long as human beings people the earth,
We can be assured
That in our loneliness
There is also love—
Deep infinite love,
Waiting to be tapped,
To water the barren brown lawn of our loneliness—
Love which shrivels if kept to the self;
Which flourishes only if it is given away.

I need you.
You need me.
I know it.
You know it.
What are we waiting for?
We affirm and Promote: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning

Opening Reading:

You Reading This, Be Ready

Starting here, what do you want to remember? How sunlight creeps along a shining floor? What scent of old wood hovers, what softened sound from outside fills the air?

Will you ever bring a better gift for the world than the breathing respect that you carry wherever you go right now? Are you waiting for time to show you some better thoughts?

When you turn around, starting here, lift this new glimpse that you found; carry into evening all that you want from this day. This interval you spent reading or hearing this, keep it for life -

What can anyone give you greater than now, starting here, right in this room, when you turn around?

~ William Stafford ~

(The Way It Is)

Check in

Discussion Questions:

Where are you in your search for truth and meaning? Where have you traveled to get here?

Why is it important for the search to be free? Why is it important for the search to be responsible?

How do we discern whether a person is searching responsibly or not? In other words, are there limits to what UU’s can believe?

If there are limits, how do we set them? How do we communicate them?
Check-out: Likes and Wishes

Closing Reading: Journey

A journey continues until it stops
A journey that stops is no longer a journey
A journey loses thing on its way
A journey passes through things, thing pass through it
When a journey is over, it loses itself to a place
When a journey remembers, it begins a journal
Which is a new journey about an old journey
A journey over time is different from a journey into time
An actual journey is into the future
A reflective journey is into the past

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A journey always begins in a place called Here
Pack your bags and imagine your journey
Unpack your bags and imagine your journey is done

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If you're afraid of a journey, don't buy shoes

~ Mark Strand ~
**UU Principles: Session Five**

We affirm and Promote: The right of conscience and the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.

**Opening Reading:**

The Idea of Democracy by Abraham Lincoln

As labor is the common burden of our race, so the effort of some to shift their share of the burden onto the shoulders of others is the great, durable curse of the race. As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master.

This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy. Our reliance is in our love for liberty; our defense is in the spirit which prizes liberty as the heritage of all people in all lands everywhere. Destroy this spirit, and we have planted the seeds of despotism at our own doors. Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and cannot long retain it.

Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope in the world? Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it.

**Check in**

**Discussion Questions:**

Do you think it’s appropriate to talk politics at church?

When you are facilitating and the discussion turns to politics, what will you do?

Religious liberals are often political liberals, but not always. How do we stand up for what we believe and value while still providing room for political differences?

What is the value of understanding both sides of an issue? Of being in relationship with people who see the world differently than you do?

How, practically, do you build consensus in a group as large as this congregation?

**Check-out: Likes and Wishes**
Closing Reading: by Mark Morrison-Reed

This is the central task of the worshipping community: to invite the Spiritual Presence; to unveil the connectedness of all humanity through the story of life; and thus to reveal this universal truth, which is only discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others. Once felt it inspires us to act for justice.

The dynamics of intellectual, spiritual, and political freedom occur within the religious community. This loving and supportive association assures us we are not fighting for justice alone, but rather striving as members of a larger community.

The religious community is essential, for alone our vision is too narrow to see all that must be seen, and our power too limited to do all that must be done. But together, our vision widens and our strength is renewed.
**UU Principles: Session Six**

We affirm and Promote: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

**Opening Reading:**

*The Great Lesson* by Olympia Brown

We can never make the world safe by fighting. Every nation must learn that the people of all nations are children of God, and must share the wealth of the world.

You may say this is impracticable, far away, can never be accomplished, but it is the work we are appointed to do. Sometime, somehow, somewhere, we must ever teach this great lesson.

**Check in**

**Discussion Questions:**

Can you describe a moment when you felt completely at peace?

Do you think healthy conflict has a place in the quest for peace?

Do you think this congregation should pay more attention to local or global concerns?

Have you ever been called on to mediate a conflict?

What are the spiritual practices that promote peace?

**Check-out: Likes and Wishes**

**Closing Reading:**

If there is to be peace in the world,
   There must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations,
   There must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities,
   There must be peace between neighbors.
If there is to be peace between neighbors,
   There must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
   There must be peace in the heart.

-Lao Tse
UU Principles: Session Seven

We affirm and Promote: respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Opening Reading:

door of being, dawn and wake me,
allow me to see the face of this day,
allow me to see the face of this night,
all communicates, all is transformed,
arch of blood, bridge of the pulse,
take me to the other side of this night,
where I am you, we are us,
the kingdom where pronouns are intertwined,

door of being: open your being
and wake, learn to be ....

~ Octavio Paz ~

( Sunstone/Piedra de Sol, translated by Eliot Winberger)

Check in

Discussion Questions:

Have you had a moment where you experienced your connection to the interdependent web? When? What was it like?

What are the ways that you live out “respect for the interdependent web” in your own life?

Are you afraid about the negative impact human beings have had and are having on the environment?

Do you think we are in the midst of a “green revolution”? What are the signs of hope that you see?

Check-out: Likes and Wishes

Closing Reading:

The Place I Want to Get Back To

is where
in the pinewoods
in the moments between
the darkness

and first light
two deer
came walking down the hill
and when they saw me

ey they said to each other, okay,
this one is okay,
let's see who she is
and why she is sitting

on the ground, like that,
so quiet, as if
asleep, or in a dream,
but, anyway, harmless;

and so they come
on their slender legs
and gazed upon me
not unlike the way

I go out to the dunes and look
and look and look
into the faces of the flowers;
and then one of them leaned forward

and nuzzled my hand, and what can my life
bring me that could exceed
that brief moment?
For twenty years

I have gone every day to the same woods,
not waiting, exactly, just lingering.
Such gifts, bestowed,
can't be repeated.

If you want to talk about this
come to visit. I live in the house
near the corner, which I have named
Gratitude.

~ Mary Oliver ~
"Thirst"