

Chalice Circle Session Plans
2007-2008

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Kitsap Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

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Covenants

Standard KUUF Chalice Circle Covenant: Together, we covenant to:

1. Attend each meeting, or contact the facilitator if we are unable to attend.
2. Begin and end on time, or let someone know if we need to be late or leave early.
3. Treat each other with respect and love-- listening without interrupting, discussing without arguing, speaking our own truth without needing it to be the ONLY truth—in the context of a caring relationship. We do not have to think alike to love alike.
4. Ensure that all members participate equally and fully, and that sharing is held in confidence until and unless permission is given to share more widely.
5. Adopt a service project to benefit the church community or the larger community.
6. Actively recruit and welcome new members, and to divide when the group reaches 12 people (the empty chair is symbolic of this openness).
7. Share responsibility for our group's health and value, by speaking up when we feel one of these covenants has been violated, or even revising these covenants if needed.

Sample covenant from the UUA Curriculum, Weaving the Fabric of Diversity: We choose to be in relationship with one another for our mutual growth and development. We agree to keep confidential personal sharing made within the group. We agree that we are willing to reexamine our own attitudes so that each person can become more affirming of others and open to diversity. We want our congregation to be a welcoming and inclusive place for all people.

Litany of Atonement (#637, SLT)

For remaining silent when a single voice would have made a difference

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For each time that our fears have made us rigid and inaccessible

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For each time that we have struck out in anger without just cause

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For each time that our greed has blinded us to the needs of others

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For the selfishness which sets us apart and alone

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For falling short of the admonitions of the spirit

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For losing sight of our unity

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For those and for so many acts both evident and subtle which have fueled the illusion of separateness

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

Session 1: The Need for an Anti-Racist, Anti-Bias Theology

Opening Reading: from “The Cure at Troy” by Seamus Heaney

Human beings suffer,
they torture one another,
they get hurt and get hard.
No poem or play or song
can fully right a wrong
inflicted or endured.

The innocent in gaols
beat on their bars together.
A hunger-striker's father
stands in the graveyard dumb.
The police widow in veils
faints at the funeral home.

History says, Don't hope
on this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
the longed for tidal wave
of justice can rise up,
and hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea-change
on the far side of revenge.
Believe that a further shore
is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles
and cures and healing wells.

Call the miracle self-healing:
The utter self-revealing
double-take of feeling.
If there's fire on the mountain
Or lightning and storm
And a god speaks from the sky

That means someone is hearing
the outcry and the birth-cry
of new life at its term.

Discussion Questions:

1. Martin Luther King, Jr. once described white racism as “eternal death of the spirit.” What are the ways in which societal structures such as racism and sexism damage your spirit?
2. Describe a time when you felt diminished or discriminated against due to one facet of your identity.
3. Describe a time when you experienced yourself as making a snap judgment about someone based on their appearance or what you knew of their identity.
4. Rev. Liz has framed the work we will do this year as identifying our fears and then choosing to meet them with love. What are you afraid of in this work? How can we be supportive of each other?
5. When you have brought down the walls and entered into authentic relationships with people who fall into a particular “category,” what have you learned? What have been the gifts and the challenges?

Closing Reading: It Is I Who Must Begin by Vaclav Havel

It is I who must begin.
Once I begin, once I try --
 here and now,
 right where I am,
 not excusing myself
 by saying things
would be easier elsewhere,
without grand speeches and
ostentatious gestures,
but all the more persistently
 -- to live in harmony
with the "voice of Being," as I
understand it within myself
 -- as soon as I begin that,
 I suddenly discover,
 to my surprise, that
I am neither the only one,
 nor the first,
nor the most important one
 to have set out
 upon that road.

Whether all is really lost
or not depends entirely on
whether or not I am lost.

Session 2: Does our UU faith call us to anti-racism, anti-oppression work?

Opening Reading: Why does the world need another religion?
(from the website of the UU Student group at Rice University)

In a world with so much hatred and violence,
 We need a religion that proclaims
 the inherent worth and dignity of every person.
In a world with so much brutality and fear,
 We need a religion that seeks
 justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.
In a world with so many persons abused and neglected,
 We need a religion that calls us
to accept one another and encourage one another to spiritual growth.
In a world with so much dogmatism and falsehood,
 We need a religion that challenges us
 to a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.
In a world with so much tyranny and oppression,
 We need a religion that affirms
the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process.
In a world with so much inequality and strife,
 We need a religion that strives
toward the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.
In a world with so much environmental degradation,
 We need a religion that advocates
respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.
In a world with so much uncertainty and despair,
 We need a religion that teaches
 our hearts to hope, and our hands to serve.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you feel that, to be true to our principles, we must strive to become an anti-racist institution? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. Do you feel that, to be true to our principles, each person must strive to do anti-racist, anti-oppression spiritual work? If so, why? If not, why not?
3. Doing anti-racism/anti-oppression work typically brings up feelings of fear, anxiety, denial, and defensiveness. What will you do when you feel these things? How will you handle it when other people seem to be feeling them? How can you, as a community, both support and challenge each other in this work?
4. As children, we are exposed to many different stereotypes. Our parents, our teachers, our communities, the media...what are the forces that shaped your preconceived notions about people?

5. Talk about your own journey of discovery/recovery from bias and prejudice. What got you started? What have been the biggest challenges? What have been the gifts and rewards?

Closing Reading: The Substance You Taste by Hafiz

The sky-wheel turns us into dawn
and fills creation again with color.

Let it be our weakness, this thirst-love
for the world, the sun coming up
like red-gold being poured!

The potter's wheel moves,
and shapes change quickly.

Let the jar I am becoming
turn into a wine cup.
Fill me with your love
for being awake.

I'm no hypocrite renunciate.
Call me this delicious substance
you taste when you create new beauty.

Be strong, Hafiz!
Work here inside time,
where we fail, catch hold
again, and climb.

Session 3: From theory to praxis

Opening Reading: from Sister Outsider by Audre Lord, p. 123

...we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house....the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships.

Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals. For Black and white, old and young, lesbian and heterosexual alike, this can mean new paths to our survival.

Discussion Questions:

1. Claire and Rev. Liz introduced three separate ways to “walk our talk.” One is the spiritual practice of Tonglen. One is the relational practice of compassionate listening. One is the structural practice of standing up for justice and working for diversity and fairness in our institutions. Discuss the merits of these three approaches.
2. Are there other ways in which you think we can take our anti-oppression theory and theology and put it into practice?
3. Is there any work you feel especially drawn to?
4. Is there any work you feel especially scared of?
5. The goal of this year is to be open and honest about where we are, and to gently invite one another a step or two further along. Where are you? Do you have any sense yet of the steps you might be willing to take?

Closing Reading: Seeing, in Three Pieces by Kate Knapp

1

Somehow we must see
through the shimmering cloth
of daily life, its painted,
evasive facings of what to eat,
to wear? Which work
matters? Is a bird more
or less than a man?

2

There have been people
who helped the world. Named
or not named. They weren't interested
in what might matter,
doubled over as they were
with compassion. Laden
branches, bright rivers.

3

When a bulb burns out
we just change it--
it's not the bulb we love;
it's the light.

Session 4: Finding our sore spots

Opening Reading: “Fern, Coal, Diamond” by Arthur Sze

The intense pressure of the earth
makes coal out of ferns, diamonds out of coal.
The intense pressure of the earth
is within us, and makes coal
and diamond desires.

For instance, we are a river
flowing and flowing out to sea,
an oak fire flaring and flaring in a night
with no wind, or, protean,
a river, a fire, an oak, a hawk, a wind.

And now, at first light,
I mark the stages of our growth:
mark fern, coal, diamond,
mark a pressure transforming
even broken nails and broken glass into
clear molten light.

Discussion Questions:

1. This year we’ll be discussing ageism, sexism, racism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, the integration of pain and trauma, and religious discrimination. Are any of these topics sore spots for you? Why?
2. Choose one group of people it is hard for you to feel compassion for. (For instance: drug addicts, smokers, child abusers.) What are the barriers? Can you bring them down, even if just a little? (For example, feeling compassion for addicts in recovery, smokers who got addicted early on and have tried to quit, the abused children that abusers used to be.)
3. If worth and dignity are inherent, can a person lose all worth and dignity through their actions and choices? Or is there always something that deserves compassion in a person?
4. Choose one person who you are angry at, either personally or publicly. Accepting that you have good reason to feel the way you do, can you also find a way to embrace this person’s common humanity and inherent worth and dignity?

Closing Reading: "Concerning the Atoms of the Soul" by John Glenday

Someone explained once how the pieces of what we are
fall downwards at the same rate
as the Universe.

The atoms of us, falling towards the centre

of whatever everything is. And we don't see it.
We only sense their slight drag in the lifting hand.
That's what weight is, that communal process of falling.
Furthermore, these atoms carry hooks, like burrs,

hooks catching like hooks, like clinging to like,
that's what keeps us from becoming something else,
and why in early love, we sometimes
feel the tug of the heart snagging on another's heart.

Only the atoms of the soul are perfect spheres
with no means of holding on to the world
or perhaps no need for holding on,
and so they fall through our lives catching

against nothing, like perfect rain,
and in the end, he wrote, mix in that common well of light
at the centre of whatever the suspected
centre is, or might have been.

Session 5: Ageism: Part I

Opening Reading: "The Faces at Braga" by David Whyte

In monastery darkness
by the light of one flashlight
the old shrine room waits in silence

...

And the old monk leads us,
bent back nudging blackness
prayer beads in the hand that beckons.

We light the butter lamps
and bow, eyes blinking in the
pungent smoke, look up without a word,

see faces in meditation,
a hundred faces carved above,
eye lines wrinkled in the hand held light.

Such love in solid wood!
Taken from the hillsides and carved in silence
they have the vibrant stillness of those who made them.

...

Carved in devotion
their eyes have softened through age
and their mouths curve through delight of the carvers hand.

If only our own faces
would allow the invisible carver's hand
to bring the deep grain of love to the surface.

...

If only we could give ourselves
to the blows of the carvers hands,
the lines in our faces would be the trace lines of rivers

feeding the sea
where voices meet, praising the features
of the mountain and the cloud and the sky.

Our faces would fall away
until we, growing younger toward death
every day, would gather all our flaws in celebration

to merge with them perfectly,
impossibly, wedded to our essence,
full of silence from the carver's hand

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think our culture reveres youth and beauty? How do you feel about plastic surgery?
2. Have you been a caretaker for a parent or other older relative? What was it like? What did you learn?
3. Have you been a caretaker or worked with children lately? What was it like? What did you learn? Teenagers? Young adults?
4. If you could be yourself at any age, either moving back in time or jumping forward, what age would you choose? Why?
5. In what ways are you like your parents? In what ways do you choose to be different?

Closing Reading: Fresh by Naomi Shihab Nye

To move
Cleanly.
Needing to be
Nowhere else.
Wanting nothing
From any store.
To lift something
You already had
And set it down in
A new place.
Awakened eye
Seeing freshly.
What does that do to
The old blood moving through
Its channels?

Session 6: Ageism: Part II

Opening Reading: To a Child Running in Canyon de Chelly by N. Scott Momaday

You are small and intense
In your excitement, whole,
Embodied in delight.
The backdrop is immense;
The sand drifts break and roll
Through cleavages of light
And shadow. You embrace
The spirit of this place.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you have close relationships with people of all ages? If not, why not?
2. Have you ever dismissed someone's opinion or abilities because "they're too young to know any better"? When? What happened? Were you proved right or wrong?
3. Have you ever dismissed someone's opinion or abilities because "they're stuck in the stone age"? When? What happened? Were you proved right or wrong?
4. Have you heard ageist comments or witnessed ageist behavior at KUUF?
5. Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your youth or your age? Tell us the story.

Closing Reading: we are running by Lucille Clifton

running and
time is clocking us
from the edge like an only
daughter.
our mothers stream before us,
cradling their breasts in their
hands.
oh pray that what we want
is worth this running,
pray that what we're running
toward
is what we want.

Session 7: Sexism: Part I

Opening Reading: "The woman in the ordinary" by Marge Piercy

The woman in the ordinary pudgy downcast girl
is crouching with eyes and muscles clenched.
Round and pebble smooth she effaces herself
under ripples of conversation and debate.
The woman in the block of ivory soap
has massive thighs that neigh,
great breasts that blare and strong arms that trumpet.
The woman of the golden fleece
laughs uproariously from the belly
inside the girl who imitates
a Christmas card virgin with glued hands,
who fishes for herself in other's eyes,
who stoops and creeps to make herself smaller.
In her bottled up is a woman peppery as curry,
a yam of a woman of butter and brass,
compounded of acid and sweet like a pineapple,
like a hand grenade set to explode,
like goldenrod ready to bloom.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the ways in which your gender identity has affected your life? How has it limited you? How has it granted you privilege?
2. How does the media define femininity? Masculinity? How does that affect people and the way they think of themselves?
3. Though the variations within genders are greater than the differences between them, still, it's possible to generalize ways in which men and women are different. What are the key differences that you've come to understand?
4. Think about anger for a moment. How do you respond to an angry man? How do you respond to an angry woman? Is there a difference?
5. Think about sadness. When you see a man grieving, what is your reaction? When you see a woman grieving, what is your reaction? Is there a difference?
6. The holidays are approaching. How do holiday preparations differ along gender lines?

Closing Reading: "No More Clichés" by Octavio Paz

Beautiful face

...

How many poems have been written to you?

...

But today I won't make one more Cliché

...

This poem is dedicated to those women
Whose beauty is in their charm,
In their intelligence,
In their character,
Not on their fabricated looks.

This poem is to you women,
That like a Shahrazade wake up
Everyday with a new story to tell,
A story that sings for change
That hopes for battles:
Battles for the love of the united flesh
Battles for passions aroused by a new day
Battles for the neglected rights
Or just battles to survive one more night.

Yes, to you women in a world of pain
To you, bright star in this ever-spending universe
To you, fighter of a thousand-and-one fights
To you, friend of my heart.

From now on, my head won't look down to a magazine
Rather, it will contemplate the night
And its bright stars,
And so, no more clichés.

Session 8: Sexism: Part II

Note to Facilitators: This is not an easy session. Feel free to wait 'til after the holidays or to skip it if you feel your group is not in a place to do this piece of soul work. You could do it later, in the month we tackle "integrating violence and loss."

Opening Reading: "With No Immediate Cause" by Ntozake Shange

every 3 minutes a woman is beaten
every five minutes a
woman is raped/every ten minutes
a lil girl is molested
yet i rode the subway today
i sat next to an old man who
may have beaten his old wife
3 minutes ago or 3 days/30 years ago

...

i rode the subway today
& bought a paper from a
man who might
have held his old lady onto
a hot pressing iron/i don't know

...

i bought the paper
looking for the announcement
the discovery/of the dismembered
woman's body/the
victims have not all been
identified/today they are
naked and dead/refuse to
testify/one girl out of 10's not
coherent/i took the coffee
& spit it up/i found an
announcement/not the woman's
bloated body in the river/floating
not the child bleeding in the
59th street corridor/not the baby
broken on the floor/
there is some concern
that alleged battered women
might start to murder their
husbands & lovers with "no
immediate cause"

...

we all have immediate cause

every 3 minutes
every 5 minutes
every 10 minutes
every day
women's bodies are found
in alleys & bedrooms/at the top of the stairs
...
every three minutes
every five minutes
every ten minutes
every day.

Discussion Questions:

1. Violence against women is a pervasive problem that cuts through all social strata. Odds are, you know someone who is a survivor. You may be one, yourself. What is your experience? How do you feel about what you know?
2. Do you think males are biologically more prone to violence?
3. One reason that is typically given for women not being allowed into combat is that they are vulnerable to rape. In fact, most women in the service are either harassed or sexually assaulted at least once in the course of their career by their own colleagues. How do you feel about women in combat? How do you feel about women in the military in general?
4. How do we raise our young boys to become men who resist the urge to do violence? How do we raise our young girls to survive and thrive...safely...in the world as it is?
5. Do you think things are better now than they were 10 years ago? 20? 50? 100?

Closing Reading: "Scars" by William Stafford

They tell us how it was, and how time
came along, and how it happened
again and again. They tell
the slant life takes when it turns
and slashes your face as a friend.

Any wound is real. In church
a woman lets the sun find her cheek, and we see the lesson:
there are years in that book: there are sorrows
a choir can't reach when they sing.

Rows of children lift their faces of promise,
places where scars will be.

Session 9: Racism: Part I

Opening Reading: from “Theology’s Great Sin” by James Cone in Soul Work: Anti-racist Theologies in Dialogue, p. 3

We are all bound together, inseparably linked by a common humanity. What we do to one another, we do to ourselves. That was why Martin King was absolutely committed to nonviolence. Anything less, he believed, was self-inflicted violence against one’s soul...King struggled mightily to redeem the soul of America so that people of all colors and religious orientations could create the beloved community.

Racism is particularly alive and well in America. It is America’s original sin and, as it is institutionalized at all levels of society, its most persistent and intractable evil.

Discussion Questions:

1. “A growing number of scientists—behaviorists, biologists, and geneticists among them- lately have been pushing an idea, touted by social scientists and anthropologists earlier this century, that race is a purely social construct...” (Anthony Flint, in the Boston Globe, March 5, 1995.) Historians at this point believe that race as a concept was deliberately introduced into the US during the early colonial period as a justification for inhumane and exploitative treatment of people of color and to keep indentured servants and other poor people from organizing against the elite. Does this new understanding ring true for you? What does it mean here and now?
2. Think about an institution that serves the public...local government, national government, non-profit organizations, etc. Think about who is the person at the top of the organizational chart. Think about the people who are served by the institution. Does it seem that people of color are fairly represented in the power structures you are familiar with? How often do you see people of color in charge of making decisions that impact white people? How often do you see white people in charge of making decisions that impact people of color?
3. What were you taught about race as a child...by your parents? Your teachers? Friends and extended family? The media? Your childhood religion?
4. What have been the gifts and challenges that grew out of your relationships with people of color?
5. How pressing is the issue of racism here in Kitsap County?

Remember me?
I am the girl
with the dark skin

whose shoes are thin
I am the girl
with the rotted teeth
I am the girl
with the wounded eye
and the melted ear.

I am the girl
holding their babies
cooking their meals
sweeping their yards
washing their clothes
Dark and rotting
and wounded, wounded.

I would give
to the human race
only hope.

I am the woman
with the blessed
dark skin
I am the woman
with teeth repaired
I am the woman
with the healing eye
the ear that hears.

I am the woman: Dark,
repaired, healed
Listening to you.

I would give
to the human race
only hope.

I am the woman
offering two flowers
whose roots
are twin

Justice and Hope
Hope and Justice

Let us begin.

Session 10: Racism: Part II

Opening Reading: "God Give to Men" by Arna Bontemps

God give the yellow man
an easy breeze at blossom time.
Grant his eager, slanting eyes to cover
every land and dream
of afterwhile.

Give blue-eyed men their swivel chairs
to whirl in tall buildings.
Allow them many ships at sea,
and on land, soldiers
and policemen.

For black man, God,
no need to bother more
but only fill afresh his meed
of laughter,
his cup of tears.

God suffer little men
the taste of soul's desire.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think a tolerance for discomfort is necessary in anti-racism work? How high is your tolerance for discomfort?
2. Some scholars have drawn links between chattel slavery and the disproportionate numbers of people of color providing free labor in the prison-industrial complex. Do you believe our justice system is corrupted by racism? To what extent?
3. Globally, people with darker skin are much more likely to live in poverty than people with white skin. In much of Africa and the Middle East, the wounds from the colonial era are still festering (if not re-inflicted). How else has the artificial concept of race shaped world history?
4. How do you feel about reparations (paying out money to people whose ancestors were enslaved)?
5. What do you feel called to do about racism personally? In our congregation? In our community? In our country? The world?
6. How do you keep from becoming overwhelmed by the size and complexity of the problem?

Closing Reading: "The Real Work" by Wendell Berry

It may be that when we no longer know what to do
we have come to our real work,

and that when we no longer know which way to go
we have come to our real journey.

The mind that is not baffled is not employed.

The impeded stream is the one that sings.

Session 11: Heterosexism: Part I

Opening Reading: by Rita Mae Brown, from Bingo, quoted in Weaving the Fabric of Diversity.

I subscribe to the blue dot theory of human sexuality. Actually, I don't subscribe to it; I made it up. If on any given day every single person who has ever had homosexual sex woke up with a blue dot on his or her forehead, either three quarters of adult America would stay in bed or they'd be brazen and hit the streets, and finally all this huffing and puffing over who sleeps with whom would be *over*. Now there's more to this theory. I think the color of the dot should reflect the level of one's activity. So if you were stone gay your dot would be blue-black. If you'd once had a small experiment the dot would be such a pale blue as to be nearly white. My dot registered turquoise, somewhere in the middle but just a bit over the line.

I loathe this American obsession with sex and sexual definition. I am not who I sleep with.

Discussion Questions:

1. Imagine it is the year 2700. Centuries of overpopulation have led to a criminalization of heterosexuality. (Not so far-fetched. Seven hundred years ago, there was very little stigma attached to homosexuality.) Imagine that, as a heterosexual, you are vulnerable because of your sexuality. Your relationships must be kept secret, and you are pressured by individuals, the media, and societal structures to change your orientation. What would you do? What would you say? How would you feel?
2. What are the things that heterosexuals can take for granted, that gays and lesbians can't be sure of?
3. Have you (regardless of sexual orientation) ever been called by a homophobic epithet such as fag, queer, dyke, etc? If so, have you changed your behavior so that you would not be called by that name?
4. What is your experience of this congregation? Are there heterosexist assumptions or practices, or particular events that have hurt or offended you, or hurt or offended someone you know?

Closing Reading: "as is the sea marvelous" by e. e. cummings

as is the sea marvelous
from god's
hands which sent her forth
to sleep upon the world

and the earth withers
the moon crumbles
one by one
stars flutter into dust

but the sea
does not change
and she goes forth out of hands and
she returns into hands

and is with sleep....

love,
the breaking

of your
soul
upon
my lips

Session 12: Beyond the Gender Binary

Opening Words: by Elias Farajaje-Jones, “Queer (y) ing Religious Education: Teaching the Re (volutionary) S(ub)- V(ersions)! or Relax! It’s just Religious Ed” in Unitarian Universalism: Selected Essays, 2001.

Transgendered people are not in disorder. The disorder comes from a society that is limited to a binary construction of gender and sexuality: You’re a man or a woman, as many would say. As transgender activist/theorist/deity Leslie Feinberg says in his book *Transliberation*, trans people are not saying that they want the categories of man and woman to disappear; they’re challenging us to open up to far more rich and complex possibilities...None of us is just like everybody else. We don’t have to be like everybody else to be guaranteed the right to safe and whole existences. We want to create a world in which everyone is able to discover and define and live who they are, who they are becoming...Now that’s revolutionary religious education!

Definitions:

Gender Identity refers to a person’s internal, deeply-felt sense of being either male, female, something other, or in between. Everyone has a gender identity.

Transgender is an umbrella term that can be used to describe people whose gender expression is nonconforming and/or whose gender identity is different from their birth assigned gender.

Transsexual is a term most commonly used to someone who transitions from one gender to another. Transition may, but does not always, include necessary medical care like hormone therapy, counseling, and/or surgery.

Genderqueer refers to people who do not identify as, or who do not express themselves as completely male or female. Genderqueer people may or may not identify as transgender.

Discussion Questions:

1. People who identify as gender queer make a distinction between sex (as determined by biology) and gender (which is a social construct.) Do you see the value in making this distinction?
2. Have you knowingly encountered people who are transgender? What was your emotional reaction?
3. Have you seen “Transamerica?” What did you think?
4. Are there ways in which the male or female gender construct chafes in you? Does acknowledging this help you accept people who are transgender?

5. We had an incident in this congregation with an individual who behaved in unsafe ways near our children. S/he happened to be a man who dressed as a woman. What feelings did this episode bring up for you?

Closing Reading: excerpt from the preface to "Leaves of Grass" by Walt Whitman

This is what you should do:
Love the earth and sun and animals,
despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks,
stand up for the stupid and crazy,
devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants,
argue not concerning God,
have patience and indulgence toward the people...
reexamine all you have been told in school or church or in any book,
dismiss what insults your very soul,
and your flesh shall become a great poem.

Session 13: Classism: Part I

Opening Reading: from Weaving the Fabric of Diversity: An Anti-bias Program for Adults, by Jacqui James and Judith Frediani, (p. 39)

Why is class such a touchy subject, especially, perhaps, to the middle class? We avoid talking about class and class issues for many reasons, including the following:

- To protect the myth that there are no classes in a democratic society.
- To protect the myth that we don't prejudge people by such class signals as occupation, income, formal education, home ownership, and manner of speech and dress.
- To protect the myth that we deserve all the success we enjoy, and implicitly, that most people somehow 'deserve' the lack of success they experience.
- To deny our fear that we could fall out of our class through such events as loss of job, divorce, or catastrophic medical expenses.
- To deny that we feel insecure and envious around others whose status we perceive to be higher, and uncomfortable and guilty around those whose status we perceive to be lower.

Discussion Questions:

1. Can you think of common assumptions made in our congregation that have class implications? (eg. All graduating seniors head to college, all people have access to a computer or a car.) Brainstorm a list.
2. What is your own class background? Has it shifted during your lifetime? How does your class inform your life?
3. Think about an interaction with someone who you would describe as being in a higher or lower class than you. What did it feel like? Were you insecure and envious? Were you uncomfortable and guilty?
4. Are there classist assumptions or practices in our congregation that have hurt you? Others that you know of? Members of your family? People outside of the congregation?

Closing Reading: “At the Teahouse, 6 am” by Holly Hughes

Sunrise at the octagonal hut;
beyond, where two decks meet,
a lizard does pushups in the sun.
I see the green, chattering world
through the window, I see
my image in the window.
Both are present; are both true?
A bee enters the hut, buzzes
insistently against the window,
but the window won't yield
to his wishes. I want to
show him the open door,
say *this world through the glass*
is only an illusion but I don't.
How long will he hurl himself
against the dusty glass? How long
will we believe we are not free?

Session 14: Classism: Part II

Opening Reading: "Advertisement For The Waldorf-Astoria" by Langston Hughes

Fine living . . . a la carte?
Come to the Waldorf-Astoria!

LISTEN HUNGRY ONES!

Look! See what Vanity Fair says about the
new Waldorf-Astoria:

"All the luxuries of private home. . . ."
Now, won't that be charming when the last flop-house
has turned you down this winter?

Furthermore:

"It is far beyond anything hitherto attempted in the hotel
world. . . ." It cost twenty-eight million dollars.

The famous Oscar Tschirky is in charge of banqueting.
Alexandre Gastaud is chef. It will be a distinguished
background for society.

So when you've no place else to go, homeless and hungry
ones, choose the Waldorf as a background for your rags--
(Or do you still consider the subway after midnight good
enough?)

...

Have luncheon there this afternoon, all you jobless.

Why not?

Dine with some of the men and women who got rich off of
your labor, who clip coupons with clean white fingers
because your hands dug coal, drilled stone, sewed gar-
ments, poured steel to let other people draw dividends
and live easy.

(Or haven't you had enough yet of the soup-lines and the bit-
ter bread of charity?)

Walk through Peacock Alley tonight before dinner, and get
warm, anyway. You've got nothing else to do.

Discussion Questions:

How would you describe “the good life”? Who do you know who is living it?

What does it mean to “keep up appearances”? Do you try to do it? Has it ever been a struggle?

What does money mean to you?

How is your relationship to money informed by your faith?

Closing Reading: “Expect Nothing” by Alice Walker

Expect nothing. Live frugally
On surprise.
Become a stranger
To need of pity
Or, if compassion be freely
Given out
Take only enough
Stop short of urge to plead
Then purge away the need.

Wish for nothing larger
Than your own small heart
Or greater than a star;
Tame wild disappointment
With caress unmoved and cold
Make of it a parka
For your soul.

Discover the reason why
So tiny a human midget
Exists at all
So scared unwise
But expect nothing. Live frugally
On surprise.

Session 15: Ableism (Physical Challenges)

Opening Reading: from Waist High in the World: A Life Among the Disabled by Nancy Mairs

Most nondisabled people...have gotten the message that it isn't exactly politically correct to look me up and down and burst out, "Oh, you poor thing!" Instead, their response tends to take the form of unmerited admiration. "You are so brave!" they gush... "I could never do what you do!" Of course they could...do exactly what I do, maybe do it better, but the very thought of ever being like me so horrifies them that they can't permit themselves to put themselves on my wheels even for an instant....Better to deny the perfectly ordinary qualities most cripples possess, thus ascribing to them an other, safely remote reality, than to risk identification of their own lives with a life that dismays and perhaps even disgusts them. (p. 32)

Discussion

1. What is your experience with people with physical challenges that make it difficult for them to get around? Have you ever faced any yourself? What was it like? How did people treat you?
2. When you see someone with an obvious physical disability in a public setting, how do you typically react? What do you do and how do you feel?
3. How accessible do you think our congregation is to people with limited mobility? To people with impaired hearing? To people with partial or complete blindness? Do you have stories of people with physical disabilities feeling marginalized or unwelcome at KUUF or at another UU congregation?
4. When and how is it appropriate to offer help to a person with a physical disability?

Closing Reading: "Naming" by Nancy Mairs

Let me tell you this once
(I will not be able to say it again):
I have lost the meaning of words.
Heavy, they ripped away from the sounds,
fell into cracked ground. For weeks
I scratched but what I dug up was
bicycle spokes, black melon rinds,
a smashed doll face--it was not meaning.
I don't know what I am saying.

I exaggerate. Not everything is gone.
I still know perfectly what sugar means,
and pine needle. Laughter is more
of a problem. And yellow often slides,
a plate of butter in the sun.
The meaning of flower has gone entirely;
so has the meaning of love. Now it is safe
to say: I love you. Now it is true.

Session 16: Ableism: Mental Illness and Developmental Delays

Opening Words: “Branded” by Nikolas (on the NAMI SCC website)

Mental illness
Is a label
Society brands
Us with.
We are laughed at,
Ridiculed, and all around disrespected
For something
Beyond our control.
We are not sideshow freaks
To be stared at-
Just because we laugh a little too hard
Or zone out.
We're just easily amused
And a bit more philosophical than the next guy.
We have feelings
And our shell might be
A little more fragile than you're used to.
But just remember:
We're human.
Treat us kindly.

Discussion Questions:

1. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, approximately one in four people suffers from a diagnosable mental illness in a given year. What have you observed about the way mental illness affects a person's life?
2. Treatment of mental illness has come a long way, though most medications have serious side effects. Many people who are medicated keep their health status secret to avoid being stigmatized. Do you know of people who have decided not to be open about their own diagnosis or the diagnosis of a loved one because they felt unsafe at KUUF?
3. Do you know anyone with developmental delays? What is their life like? What are the challenges? What are the gifts?
4. How do you feel about “mainstreaming” and inclusive classrooms? What are the challenges of having developmentally delayed children and “normal” peers interact on a daily basis? What are the gifts?

Closing Reading: "The Way Wings Should" by Rumi

What will
our children do in the morning?
Will they wake with their hearts wanting to play,
the way wings
should?

Will they have dreamed the needed flights and gathered
the strength from the planets that all men and women need to balance
the wonderful charms of
the earth

so that her power and beauty does not make us forget our own?

I know all about the ways of the heart - how it wants to be alive.

Love so needs to love
that it will endure almost anything, even abuse,
just to flicker for a moment. But the sky's mouth is kind,
its song will never hurt you, for I
sing those words.

What will our children do in the morning
if they do not see us
fly?

Session 17: Integrating Trauma and Loss

Opening Reading: “Self-Portrait” by David Whyte

It doesn't interest me if there is one God
or many gods.
I want to know if you belong or feel
abandoned,
if you can know despair or see it in others.
I want to know
if you are prepared to live in the world
with its harsh need
to change you. If you can look back
with firm eye,
saying this is where I stand. I want to know
if you know
how to melt into that fierce heat of living,
falling toward
the center of your longing. I want to know
if you are willing
to live, day by day, with the consequence of love
and the bitter
unwanted passion of your sure defeat.

I have heard, in *that* fierce embrace, even
the gods speak of God.

Discussion Questions:

What is the most difficult experience you've lived through?

When you were in the midst of crisis, what helped? What did people say that only made you feel worse?

Are you the kind of person your friends call when they're going through tough times? Are you able to listen and be present? What is hard about it? What are the gifts you receive?

Have you ever experienced “compassion burnout?” What did you do about it?

Closing Reading: "Testimony" by Rebecca Baggett

(for my daughters)

I want to tell you that the world
is still beautiful.

I tell you that despite
children raped on city streets,
shot down in school rooms,
despite the slow poisons seeping
from old and hidden sins
into our air, soil, water,
despite the thinning film
that encloses our aching world.
Despite my own terror and despair.

I want you to know that spring
is no small thing, that
the tender grasses curling
like a baby's fine hairs around
your fingers are a recurring
miracle. I want to tell you
that the river rocks shine
like God, that the crisp
voices of the orange and gold
October leaves are laughing at death,

I want to remind you to look
beneath the grass, to note
the fragile hieroglyphs
of ant, snail, beetle. I want
you to understand that you
are no more and no less necessary
than the brown recluse, the ruby-
throated hummingbird, the humpback
whale, the profligate mimosa.

I want to say, like Neruda,
that I am waiting for
"a great and common tenderness",
that I still believe
we are capable of attention,
that anyone who notices the world
must want to save it.

Session 18: Integrating Trauma and Loss Part II

Opening Reading: "The Sonnets to Orpheus, II, 29" by Rainer Maria Rilke

Silent friend of many distances, feel
how your breath enlarges all of space.
Let your presence ring out like a bell
into the night. What feeds upon your face

grows mighty from the nourishment thus offered.

Move through transformation, out and in.
What is the deepest loss that you have suffered?
If drinking is bitter, change yourself to wine.

In this immeasurable darkness, be the power
that rounds your sense in their magic ring,
the sense of their mysterious encounter.

And if the earthly no longer knows your name,
whisper to the silent earth: I'm flowing.
To the flashing water say: I am.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you remember the first person you loved who died? How did you move through your grief?
2. What other major losses have you suffered: a marriage? a job? a home? Perhaps something less tangible...a part of your identity?
3. What is the loss you fear the most? Do you distance yourself from people who are experiencing or have experienced that specific type of loss?
4. Have you spent time with people who are dying? How did it change you?

Closing Reading: "The Well of Grief" by David Whyte

Those who will not slip beneath
the still surface on the well of grief

turning down to its black water
to the place that we can not breathe

will never know
the source from which we drink
the secret water cold and clear

nor find in the darkness
the small gold coins
thrown by those who wished for something else

Session 19: Religious Discrimination: Part I

Opening Reading: “Half-And-Half” by Naomi Shihab Nye

You can't be, says a Palestinian Christian
on the first feast day after Ramadan.
So, half-and-half and half-and-half.
He sells glass. He knows about broken bits,
chips. If you love Jesus you can't love
anyone else. Says he.

At his stall of blue pitchers on the Via Dolorosa,
he's sweeping. The rubbed stones
feel holy. Dusting of powdered sugar
across faces of date-stuffed mamool.

This morning we lit the slim white candles
which bend over at the waist by noon.
For once the priests weren't fighting
in the church for the best spots to stand.
As a boy, my father listened to them fight.
This is partly why he prays in no language
but his own. Why I press my lips
to every exception.

A woman opens a window—here and here and here—
placing a vase of blue flowers
on an orange cloth. I follow her.
She is making a soup from what she had left
in the bowl, the shriveled garlic and bent bean.
She is leaving nothing out.

(Naomi Shihab Nye is an American poet born to a Palestinian father and an American mother.)

Discussion Questions:

What is the link between monotheism and violence?

Have you ever experienced religious discrimination?

Are there people whose faith makes it difficult for you to be in relationship with them?
What are the things that get in the way? How have you dealt with them in the past?

Describe a strong cross-faith relationship. What are the things you've learned from this person? How have you faced challenges and dealt with differences of opinion?

Closing Reading: "Salvation" by Lynn Ungar

By what are you saved? And how?
Saved like a bit of string,
tucked away in a drawer?
Saved like a child rushed from
a burning building, already
singed and coughing smoke?
Or are you salvaged
like a car part -- the one good door
when the rest is wrecked?

Do you believe me when I say
you are neither salvaged nor saved,
but salved, anointed by gentle hands
where you are most tender?
Haven't you seen
the way snow curls down
like a fresh sheet, how it
covers everything,
makes everything
beautiful, without exception?

Session 20: Religious Discrimination: Part II: Coming to terms with the Holocaust

Opening Reading: by Wendell Berry

*To my granddaughters who visited the Holocaust
Museum on the day of the burial of Yitzhak Rabin*

Now you know the worst
we humans have to know
about ourselves, and I am sorry,

for I know that you will be afraid.
To those of our bodies given
without pity to be burned, I know

there is no answer
but loving one another,
even our enemies, and this is hard.

But remember:
when a man of war becomes a man of peace,
he give a light, divine

though it is also human.
When a man of peace is killed
by a man of war, he gives a light.

You do not have to walk in darkness.
If you will have the courage for love,
you may walk in light. It will be

the light of those who have suffered
for peace. It will be
your light.

Discussion Questions:

There are those who see the Holocaust as the beginning of the end of religion...the "God is Dead" movement. Do you agree or disagree? In your opinion, would it be a good thing if people were to give up on God?

How has Christianity's violent history affected your faith journey? Where has it sent you? Where has it kept you from going?

If you believe in God, could the God you believe in have done anything to prevent the holocaust?

Along with the horrors, we have stories of triumph and beauty in the midst of the holocaust. Many of those stories emphasize the importance of keeping faith in goodness or hope. People who gave up hope and faith sank into despair, apathy, and even betrayal. If we give up faith, do we run the risk of doing the same?

Closing Reading: "Just Now" by W.S. Merwin

In the morning as the storm begins to blow away
the clear sky appears for a moment and it seems to me
that there has been something simpler than I could ever
believe
simpler than I could have begun to find words for
not patient not even waiting no more hidden
than the air itself that became part of me for a while
with every breath and remained with me unnoticed
something that was here unnamed unknown in the days
and the nights not separate from them
not separate from them as they came and were gone
it must have been here neither early nor late then
by what name can I address it now holding out my thanks