

Frequently Asked Questions About Chalice Circles

If I'm interested in joining a chalice circle, what kind of commitment must I make?

Each Chalice Circle meets one time a month for 2 hours at a regularly scheduled time. New circles form each November and meet monthly through the following June and then usually again in September and October. Some circles decide to meet over the summer. If you join a circle we ask that you make the meeting time a priority on your calendar and that you arrive in order for the meeting to start on time. The willingness of members to share deeply is positively impacted by the continuity of everyone's regular attendance. As the year proceeds, if you feel the format or schedule does not work for you, then you are free to leave the circle. Each fall we have open enrollment and registration for the next year's Circles. At that time, you can renew your commitment to your present circle, change to a new circle or end your commitment.

Once a circle is formed, isn't it difficult to incorporate new members? Why must we leave an open chair?

Every Chalice Circle has grappled with the concept of an open chair but all have successfully grown with additional members. Circle members quickly develop close bonds as we share our deep thoughts, concerns and emotions. The addition of new members expands those bonds as we extend the experience of deep listening and acceptance of new members. We are all enriched by the addition of new viewpoints, life experiences and spiritual journeys. The open chair also embodies some of our cherished UU principles: the worth and dignity of every person, acceptance of one another, encouragement to spiritual growth and a free and responsible search for meaning & truth.

How can I deepen my spiritual growth within a small group if I'm not allowed to talk about what others have shared? I want to learn from others and believe that discussing ideas with others will help me. How can I possibly not respond to statements made by others?

We know how you feel! Nearly every former and current member of Chalice Circles had that initial reaction to the "no cross-talk" format. Here's what we have learned: the simple format of intentional soul-searching and deep listening opens our hearts. The format may feel a little awkward at first, but it becomes an easy and supportive rhythm to follow (with some gentle reminders in the beginning!). This format allows each of us to express some deeply held beliefs, questions, and concerns without worrying about the reaction, judgment or advice from others. A non-discussion format also enables members to practice focused and compassionate listening to each other without needing to develop a reaction. As a group, we act as a chalice for each other, lovingly holding the expressed thoughts and concerns. And you'll be surprised how much you can grow by listening deeply to yourself and others!

What are the check-ins all about?

To start the circle, each member has an opportunity to let the group know what is important in his/her life at that time. The check-ins are meant to be brief. We often ask: “what is on top for you?” or “what are the headlines of your life?” Most of the session is spent on spiritual exploration, but we do want a quick sense of how each member is doing that day.

What if I’m interested in leading a Circle but have concerns about the amount of time it will take, my ability to choose topics or my ability to facilitate a meeting?

If you have an interest (even a small one) in convening a Chalice Circle, talk with Katie Lee or one of the Conveners. We have lots of support, resources, training and practical wisdom to share with you. There are also opportunities to share the leader role with a co-convenor. All of us had initial doubts about our skills as Conveners but with the printed resources, Katie Lee’s guidance and the monthly support of the Convener’s Chalice Circle, we have each found the experience to be very rewarding and personally enriching.

What is the purpose of the service project?

The purpose of the service project is based on an age-old model. Christians often call it ora et labora (pray and work). UUs usually refer to reflection and action. One kind of thing happens when we share our personal experiences with one another. Quite another thing happens when we share an experience together. Both yield rich resources for spiritual work. And, the service project reflects our mission of living out our values in the world.

How does the Circle choose the topic of each meeting?

Each Circle chooses topics that are meaningful and important to them. In some Circles, the responsibility for topic choice rotates amongst members while in other Circles; the members work with the Convener to develop the monthly topic. Topics cover a broad range of areas and ideas and have many sources: readings, poems, quotes, life experiences and Sunday service themes or sermons, to name a few. In addition, the Convener’s manual contains copies of many topics previously considered by Chalice Circles and lists of other topic suggestions.

I’m not sure if I’m comfortable expressing my innermost thoughts. What if others talk about my comments or about me?

A critical aspect of the Chalice Circle’s covenant is confidentiality. We do not speak about anything discussed in the Circle outside the Circle. We may speak to a member about what we said or s/he said, but we agree not to speak to or about a third party—even a member of the circle. This enables all of us to more openly explore our spiritual positions and more freely express our deepest thoughts and concerns.