

# Format for Chalice Circles

## *Opening Words*

The purpose of the opening words is to lift participants' perspectives above the mundane concerns of daily living. The opening words also often introduce the topic of the meeting. It is fine to substitute appropriate opening words of your own.

## *Chalice Lighting*

The chalice is the symbol of the Unitarian Universalist tradition. Lighting the chalice at the beginning of a meeting is another symbolic reminder that the participants are entering into a special time and place.

## *Check-in/Sharing*

This is a time when participants are invited to share how they are doing and what is happening in their lives that they would like to share with the group. Here are some other things to remember:

- There should be no general rule of confidentiality during check-in/sharing (or for any other part of the meeting.) Instead participants should be encouraged to always speak respectfully about other participants outside the group and avoid gossiping. Before sharing information outside the group, a good general rule is for participants to ask themselves how they would feel if this information was shared about them. If somebody needs to discuss something confidentially, they should contact Reverend Helen or a lay minister.
- There should be no cross talk while people check in. Use a talking stick if necessary. Encourage participants to avoid interruptions or even questions. Encourage participants to avoid giving advice unless it is specifically requested. This is a time to practice compassionate listening, the simple but difficult art of being with another person.
- Chalice Circles are not therapy groups, so participants who are experiencing significant crisis or life transitions should also be encouraged to contact Reverend Helen or a lay minister.
- If somebody is missing, find out why. If somebody has not let somebody else know the reason for an absence, the member should get a call from the facilitator or another member of the group. A common complaint in our congregations is "I was not there, and nobody cared."

- After everybody has checked in, if there is time, invite people to reflect on what others have said and share any similar experiences. If an individual has requested advice during check-in, this is the time to receive it.
- Check-in and sharing should usually last less than an hour.

### *Topic and Questions*

You should introduce the topic by the beginning of the second hour. Here are some other things to remember:

- The questions listed are meant to be suggestions. Feel free to change them and add to them.
- This is not a time for “recreational argumentation” - - an activity all too common in our congregations. Encourage participants to share life experiences more than intellectual positions.
- If the group wanders off topic, don’t worry, especially if the discussion seems fruitful. If the discussion does not seem appropriate, you might say, “I wonder if what we are talking about now is appropriate for our time together.”
- The best way to guide a discussion is with questions.
- Encourage participants not to expect resolution. Unresolved questions lead to further reflection and growth.
- If a topic doesn’t appeal at all to participants, it’s okay to change it.

### *Likes and Wishes*

This is a time to invite participants to say how they are doing at the end of the meeting, say what they liked about the meeting, and say what they wish would be different next time.

### *Reflections on the Open Chair*

You should always have one open seat in your Chalice Circle as a physical reminder that there are most likely people either at the church or outside the church who might enjoy attending a Chalice Circle. Ask participants to think of people in their lives inside the church or outside the church who might enjoy coming to the next meeting.

### *Extinguishing the Chalice*

This is a way to begin to bring closure to the circle.

### *Closing Words*

Like the opening words, the purpose of the closing words is to lift the participants' perspectives above the mundane concerns of daily living and to gracefully bring the meeting to an end.

## **Other Issues for Chalice Circle Facilitators**

### *Keys*

If your Chalice Circle is meeting at church, you may need to get the combination for the code-lock doors, as well as instructions for opening and closing our buildings. Contact our Communications Coordinator at (253) 777-4994 or email [info@saltwaterchurch.org](mailto:info@saltwaterchurch.org) .

### *Starting On Time*

Be respectful of people's time. Start and end the meeting on time. Starting late encourages people to come late. It's okay to change the time of your meeting, but please let the Chalice Circle Team know. You can send email to [chalicecircle@saltwaterchurch.org](mailto:chalicecircle@saltwaterchurch.org) .

### *Food and Beverages*

Discourage individuals from bringing food. Serving food distracts from the purpose of the meeting. Serving beverages is permissible, but only if the host wants to do so.

### *Providing Structure and Guidance*

Don't be afraid to stick to the format. Research shows that groups that are either overly-structured or overly-flexible fail. The tendency is for groups in our congregation to become overly flexible. The format for Chalice Circles provides both structure and flexibility.

### *Training an Assistant Facilitator*

If your group does not already have an assistant facilitator, *by the third meeting*, talk to another participant about becoming an assistant facilitator and ask that person to help you during the fourth meeting.

### *ECR Participants*

It is inevitable that in some groups there will be some individuals for whom extra care is required. If you are unsure how to deal with such an individual, please contact Reverend Helen, or the Chalice Circle Team.

### *Size Limitations*

No group should ever be less than six individuals or more than 12 individuals. If this happens, please contact the Chalice Circle Team.

### *Check-ins With the Minister after Each Meeting*

Please use the Chalice Circle Facilitator Check-in Form to check in with the Chalice Circle Team after each meeting.