

The Right to Water

Five Covenant Group Gatherings

“We the People of the Town of Barnstead declare that we have the duty to safeguard the water both on and beneath the Earth’s surface, and in the process, safeguard the rights of people within the community of Barnstead, and the rights of the ecosystems of which Barnstead is a part.”

Barnstead, N.H., ordinance, March, 2006



Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
www.uusc.org

Introduction

Welcome to Covenant Group Ministries with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

With these resources, UUSC supports members of the UU community in: the search for connection with each other and the larger global community; the quest for meaningful engagement with life's most challenging questions; and the pursuit to engage more effectively with local, national, and global social justice initiatives.

Through the Covenant Group model of intimacy and ultimacy, members will be inspired to take action on human rights issues that affect our global community. Small group worship and community building changes lives and enlivens commitments with purpose and passion. Individuals will find the strength and courage to take simple action steps or lead social justice projects that will ultimately help to change the world.

The Simple Steps for Environmental Justice found on the back inside cover will help move your group from sharing and caring into commitment through direct action.

UUSC Covenant Group – The Session Structure

All sessions in this series will follow this simple structure. Total time is about 2 hours. If you are not familiar with the Covenant Group model, we encourage you to read *The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry: Saving the World Ten at a Time* by Robert L. Hill.

The **welcome** (1 minute) offered at the beginning of each session is an optional statement of purpose. The group may wish to replace this statement with a covenant statement already adopted by the group or read it with the group covenant.

All of the **opening readings** (2 minutes) are taken from the Unitarian Universalist hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*.

The **chalice lighting** (2 minutes) is the same at the beginning of each session. This offers a familiar statement to center the group into worship.

The **opening checkin** (30 minutes) is an opportunity for creating connections between the members of the group. During this time, all group members are asked to give the gift of active listening, without questions or interruptions.

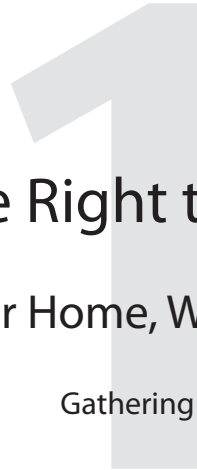
The **session topic** (5 minutes) or focus is provided through a short reading. Any member of the group can read the selected piece that will focus the group on a topic.

The **reflection questions** (60 minutes) offer the group members direction and center for sharing and dialogue. Share from a personal center of truth and love while other members listen from the heart. Refrain from debating, questioning, or judging other members.

During the **checkout** (10 minutes) the facilitator asks each person for a word or phrase that says something about how she or he is feeling as the meeting draws to an end. Group members can answer these questions: How are you feeling as we close this session? What has been meaningful to you? What are you hoping for?

The **closing readings** (2 minutes) are taken from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

The **chalice flame** is extinguished with a brief reading where the group participants symbolically become the ambassadors of the light (1 minute) who will carry our prophetic faith into action.



The Right to Water

Our Earth is Our Home, We Must Share Equally

Gathering One

Welcome and statement of purpose

We gather as a Covenant Circle to deepen our sense of meaning and community. In this spiritual community, we seek to better care for one another and to work together toward creating a kinder, more compassionate, and just local and global community.

Opening words: #420

We are here to abet creation and to witness to it,
To notice each other's beautiful face and complex nature
So that creation need not play to an empty house.

— Annie Dillard

Chalice lighting

We light this chalice to symbolize our living tradition
Let this flame symbolize our passion
 To bring our faith into action
Let this flame symbolize our commitment
 To bringing our prophetic voice to the people.
May this our passion and commitment
 Serve to advance human rights and social justice
 around the world.
So that all may live in the spirit of light and love.

Checkin

How is your spirit this evening? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here?

Reading

Threat of Global Warming/Climate Change, an excerpt from *Statement of Conscience*, Final Form, Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations*

Earth is our home. We are part of this world and its destiny is our own. Life on this planet will be gravely affected unless we embrace new practices, ethics, and values to guide our lives on a warming planet. As Unitarian Universalists, how can our faith inform our actions to remedy and mitigate global warming/climate change? We declare by this Statement of Conscience that we will not acquiesce to the ongoing degradation and destruction of life that human actions are leaving to our children and grandchildren. We as Unitarian Universalists are called to join with others to halt practices that fuel global warming/climate change, to instigate sustainable alternatives, and to mitigate the impending effects of global warming/climate change with just and ethical responses. As a people of faith, we commit to a renewed reverence for life and respect for the interdependent web of all existence...

We envision a world in which all people are assured a secure and meaningful life that is ecologically responsible and sustainable, in which every form of life has intrinsic value. In other words, Unitarian Universalists are called to defer to a balance

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between our individual needs and those of all other organisms. Entire cultures, nations, and life forms are at risk of extinction while basic human rights to adequate supplies of food, fresh water, and health as well as sustainable livelihoods for humans are being undermined....Our world is calling us to gather in community and respond from our moral and spiritual wealth; together we can transform our individual and congregational lives into acts of moral witness, discarding our harmful habits for new behaviors and practices that will sustain life on Earth, ever vigilant against injustice.

Reflection questions

1. As a person of faith, how do you show or experience reverence for earth? For all life on earth?
2. Share briefly how your patterns of consumption and consumerism may or may not reflect this reverence?
3. As a UU, do you feel spiritually or morally called to take action and change practices that will protect and preserve the basic human right to adequate supplies of food, water, and health? Explain.
4. What behaviors and practices can you change to give hope to the future generations?

Checkout

How are you feeling as we close this session? What has been most meaningful to you? What are you hoping for?

Closing words: #460

The line in life, nature, science, philosophy, religion constantly returns into itself. The opposite poles become one when the circle is completed. All truth revolves about one center. All is a manifestation of one law.

— Sarah Alden Ripley

Ambassador of the light

Although we extinguish this flame,
the spirit of life and love lives on
in our search for truth and justice.

May our actions be an expression of our commitment
to creating a more just society for all of
humanity.

So may it be. Amen.

* For the complete copy of the UUA Statement of Conscience, visit <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/socialjustice/statements/8061.shtml>.

This Covenant Group series was created by Carie J. Johnsen, Harvard Divinity School, MDiv. III, and the Rev. Dr. Ellen Johnson-Fay.

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The Right to Water

Defending the Right to Water

Gathering Two

Welcome and statement of purpose

We gather as a Covenant Circle to deepen our sense of meaning and community. In this spiritual community, we seek to better care for one another and to work together toward creating a kinder, more compassionate, and just local and global community.

Opening words: #463

My heart is moved by all I cannot save:
 So much has been destroyed
 I have cast my lot with those who, age after age,
 Perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute
 the world.

— Adrienne Rich

Chalice lighting

We light this chalice to symbolize our living tradition
 Let this flame symbolize our passion
 To bring our faith into action
 Let this flame symbolize our commitment
 To bringing our prophetic voice to the people.
 May this our passion and commitment
 Serve to advance human rights and social
 justice around the world.
 So that all may live in the spirit of light and love.

Checkin

How is your spirit this evening? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here?

Reading

Excerpts from *Defending the Right to Water*, a UUSC fact sheet*

The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible, and affordable water for personal and domestic use.

In many countries and cities, governments with inadequate resources to repair crumbling substandard systems are turning to privatization as a solution. Unfortunately, privatization often leads to increased rates and water cutoffs for those who cannot afford to pay.

Because women and girls in developing countries must get water for their families, lack of access to safe water and sanitation disproportionately affects women's lives. Half of all schools in the world do not have access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. According to Water Aid, every 15 seconds a child dies of water-related disease. Many children suffered and are suffering along the Gulf Coast in the United States without access to adequate water. Article

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24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines a children's right to water. Two countries have not ratified the treaty: the United States and Somalia.

Reflection questions

1. How are you disconnected, naive, complacent, or ambivalent about the human right to water?
2. How does your heart respond to the statistic that every 15 seconds a child dies from a water-related disease?
3. Imagine a time when you have been inconvenienced by lack of access to water. Imagine that you live like that everyday. Imagine that as your future. What happens to your dignity? Your spirit? Your basic survival?
4. How can you change your use of water and thereby participate in daily acts of water justice?

Checkout

What did you like about this session? What is your wish for this session?

Closing words: #462

I shall take my voice wherever there are those who want to hear the melody of freedom or the words that might inspire hope and courage in the face of despair and fear. My weapons are peaceful, for it is only by peace that peace is attained. The song of freedom must prevail.

— Paul Robeson

Ambassador of the light

Although we extinguish this flame,
the spirit of life and love lives on
in our search for truth and justice.

May our actions be an expression of our commitment
to creating a more just society for all of
humanity.

So may it be. Amen.

* The UUSC fact sheet can be found in its entirety at http://www.uusc.org/pdf/waterrights_factsheet06_web.pdf

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The Right to Water

Water, Water Everywhere?

Gathering Three

Welcome and statement of purpose

We gather as a Covenant Circle to deepen our sense of meaning and community. In this spiritual community, we seek to better care for one another and to work together toward creating a kinder, more compassionate, and just local and global community.

Opening words

Water is the mother of all life. There is no life without water. Whether we view it scientifically or spiritually, water is the womb from which all living beings have been born. We are made of water and we need the constant flowing through of water to remain alive in this world. We need water for our bodies, for the food we grow, for the plants and animals that provide shelter. We also need water for our hearts and spirits.

— an excerpt from “Water, Water,” a sermon by Rev. Myke Johnson*

Chalice lighting

We light this chalice to symbolize our living tradition
 Let this flame symbolize our passion
 To bring our faith into action
 Let this flame symbolize our commitment
 To bringing our prophetic voice to the people.
 May this our passion and commitment
 Serve to advance human rights and social justice
 around the world.
 So that all may live in the spirit of light and love.

Checkin

How is your spirit this evening? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here?

Reading

from *Defending the Right to Water*, a UUSC fact sheet

In Bolivia, a “water war” erupted in the streets when the water rates in Cochabamba increased by 10-36 percent. A U.S. corporation, Bechtel, had won the bid for the 40-year water services concession and increased the water rates in all communities — including the poor neighborhoods. The services, however, deteriorated.

When Bolivia invoked the contract provision to cancel the concession for nonperformance, Bechtel sued. In January 2006, the \$35 million suit settled for 32 cents and legal fees.

Water rights activist Oscar Olivera said, “It was because of the movement against abuses of privatization in Bolivia and around the world that the Cochabamba case was settled. Let people know that this victory was won because the ‘tribunal of the people’ decided it — not the tribunal of the World Bank. This is the power of the people.”

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Reflection questions

1. What resonates in your heart and spirit when you read the story about the people of Cochabamba?
2. In the opening words, Johnson shares a vision of sacred water — the mother of all life. How does your life reflect a sacred connection to this basic human need?
3. What practices could you incorporate into your daily life that would acknowledge water as a blessing and sacred element?
4. What part of your faith calls you to protect the human right to water?

Checkout

How are you feeling as we close this session?
 What has been most meaningful to you? What are you hoping for?

Closing words

(To be read responsively)

Each time we drink water,	<i>let us be thankful.</i>
Each time we wash with water,	<i>let us be thankful.</i>
Each time we feel the rain,	<i>let us be thankful.</i>
Each time we swim in water,	<i>let us be thankful.</i>
Each time we gaze at the beauty of water,	<i>let us be thankful.</i>
Each time we take action on behalf of water,	<i>let us be thankful.</i>

— adapted from “Water, Water,” by Rev. Myke Johnson

Ambassador of the light

Although we extinguish this flame,
 the spirit of life and love lives on
 in our search for truth and justice.
 May our actions be an expression of our commitment
 to creating a more just society for all of humanity.
 So may it be. Amen.

* For the complete sermon, “Water, Water,” by Rev. Myke Johnson, visit http://www.allenavenueuu.org/sermon_3-19-06.html.

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The Right to Water

Bottling Earth's Sacred Water

Gathering Four

Welcome and statement of purpose

We gather as a Covenant Circle to deepen our sense of meaning and community. In this spiritual community, we seek to better care for one another and to work together toward creating a kinder, more compassionate, and just local and global community.

Opening words: #434

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations,
And inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to
the altar of humanity.
May we know once again that we are not isolated
beings
But connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe,
To this community and to each other.

— Anonymous

Chalice lighting

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Let this flame symbolize our commitment
 To bringing our prophetic voice to the people.
May this our passion and commitment
 Serve to advance human rights and social
 justice around the world.
So that all may live in the spirit of light and love.

Checkin

How is your spirit this evening? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here?

Reading

from “Water, Water,” a sermon by Rev. Myke Johnson

When I was ten, my family went on vacation in the mountains of Wyoming. I remember coming upon a stream that had a little sign saying the water was drinkable. My sisters and I were very excited that we could drink right out of the stream. The water tasted funny to us, with its enhanced mineral content, but it was cool and refreshing nonetheless. Now, looking back on that event, I am saddened by our amazement at drinking water directly from the earth. For millennia, all people drank from rivers and streams. But in the memories of most of us, this no longer is a part of our expectations about water. We take for granted that pollution has made most water undrinkable unless it is purified.

In recent years, there has been a major campaign in the United States to sell us bottled water. Even more recently, we are seeing a push for flavor or vitamin-enhanced water. Scientists have proven that bottled water is essentially no different than tap water, and

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is less regulated in terms of quality. It is packaged in plastic, which is full of chemicals that have been shown to have multiple bad effects. But we are being subtly led to believe bottled water is cleaner or healthier than other water. It is sold to us at greater than the cost of oil. We are getting used to the idea that water is something we buy from a corporation.

Reflection questions

1. Do you remember a time of innocence in your interactions with the environment?
2. What stirs in your heart with the statement, “We take for granted that pollution has made most water undrinkable unless it is purified”?
3. How do you feel about the corporate messaging about water as a commodity?
4. What daily acts can you change to be more socially conscious and responsible about preserving our water for our children?

Checkout

How are you feeling as we close this session? What has been most meaningful to you? What are you hoping for?

Closing words: #529 “The Stream of Life”

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and death, in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment.

— Rabindranath Tagore

Ambassador of the light

Although we extinguish this flame,
the spirit of life and love lives on
in our search for truth and justice.

May our actions be an expression of our commitment
to creating a more just society for all of
humanity.

So may it be. Amen.

* For the complete sermon, “Water, Water,” by Rev. Myke Johnson, visit http://www.allenavenueuu.org/sermon_3-19-06.html.

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The Right to Water

A Water Communion Ritual

Gathering Five

Welcome and statement of purpose

We gather as a Covenant Circle to deepen our sense of meaning and community. In this spiritual community, we seek to better care for one another and to work together toward creating a kinder, more compassionate, and just local and global community.

Opening hymn: #100 "I've Got Peace Like a River"

Sing verses 1-4

Chalice lighting

We light this chalice to symbolize our living tradition

Let this flame symbolize our passion
To bring our faith into action

Let this flame symbolize our commitment
To bringing our prophetic voice to the people.

May this our passion and commitment
Serve to advance human rights
and social justice around the world.

So that all may live in the spirit of light
and love.

First reading

An excerpt from "Living Water" by Rev. Marilyn Sewell

Life originally emerged from water, and water nourishes all living things....Water is life, and therefore it is the sacred birthright of every living creature.

Water cleans, transforms, allows all the fertile earth to bloom. It is a universal symbol of purification and regeneration, and so we baptize and christen.

Sharing water stories

Spend about 20 minutes on this activity.

Each member will share briefly where or how they connect to water's many blessings. A moment of silent pause (2-3 seconds) should follow each sharing. [The group leader pours water into a vessel to represent the sacred water everywhere.]

Second Reading

An excerpt from "Living Water" by Rev. Marilyn Sewell

Every ancient culture revered water. In Sumerian, the word "mar" meant sea, but that was also the word for womb; "a" was the word for water and it also meant sperm, conception, generation. The Hebraic language includes the concept of Mem, deciphered as mother, life, womb or sea. "Everything was water," say Hindu texts, and in Tantric manuscripts, water is "prana," the vital breath which brings life.

Short meditation

For about ten minutes, sit quietly in an intentional and mindful meditation. Let your mind ponder that which you identify as your Source of Life. What gives you energy and nurtures your spirit? What provides you sustenance and centers your life? From what do you generate life?

Sharing your sacred sources

Spend about 20 minutes on this activity.

Each member will be invited to name their personal Source of Life. Share briefly what this means to you.

Third reading

adapted from “Blending Our Waters” by Rev. Dennis Hamilton

We have brought our waters, which have touched the west, the north, the south, and the east, which come from the sky and from the earth. We have brought water that is a part of the great oceans and the seas that circle the globe, teeming with life, the source of all life.

We have brought water to this place of meeting and sharing.

In this water there is new water, formed in the atmosphere daily, and there is old water, water as old as the earth, water from which life has evolved over the eons. This is the stream of life from which all life flows.

All people are connected by this stream, for it runs through our veins and courses through the stems and leaves of plants.

It is the symbol of the cleansing power of forgiveness and the faithful promise of healing love.

It is the symbol and the reality of the oneness that unites humankind and all life.

May our separate waters join into one sacred stream as we add our lives into the stream of living souls who live out love, work for justice, and hunger for peace.

Gift of life

The group leader will invite each person to reflect quietly for a moment on how water represents our oneness with life.

Blessings

The group leader will begin this blessing by dipping her fingertips in the water gathered from many sources. She will anoint/touch the forehead of the person to her right as she says, “with this gift of life I bless your life...go in love so that you may know peace.”

Closing hymn: #100 “I’ve Got Peace Like a River”

Sing verses 1, 5, and 6

Ambassador of the light

Although we extinguish this flame,
the spirit of life and love lives on
in our search for truth and justice.

May our actions be an expression of our commitment
to creating a more just society for all of
humanity.

So may it be. Amen.

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Simple Steps for the Right to Water

UUSC helps organizations around the world and in the United States to defend the right to water. We believe that:

- Water is a fundamental human right and must be provided equitably to people regardless of gender, race, or class.
- Water is part of the global commons, not a commodity.
- Water democracy means that citizens, and especially those disadvantaged by race, class, or gender, must be involved in water management in their communities.
- Water conservation and stewardship must be a top priority.

UUSC works against inappropriate privatization schemes and supports efforts to develop alternative service models that meet the human right to water while promoting sustainable use of water resources. Learn more by visiting www.uusc.org/righttowater.

Create awareness

Show the videos, *Thirst* and *It's Our Water, Dam It*, to your congregation or community group. Contact UUSC to borrow copies of these videos.

Learn about your water!

- Find the source of your water: Follow the pipes! Take a hike to the source of your water!
- Where does it come from?
- Test the water in your home or congregation. Is it safe?
- Who makes decisions about the water in your community?
- What does your water bill pay for? Anything besides water?
- What happens in your community if a family cannot pay their water bill?

Stay up to date

Visit UUSC's blog, Hotwire, and sign up for eWire, UUSC's electronic newsletter, for timely updates on legislation, campaigns, and upcoming initiatives.

Take action

Become a UUSC Human Rights Defender by signing up on our website. As a defender, you will receive action alerts to support the human right to safe, affordable water.

Blue your green

Consider becoming a Green Sanctuary under the UU Ministry for Earth program — do a water audit! For more information, visit uuministryforearth.org.

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