

Workshop 12: Learning to Lead Worship

Regular worship can build community, develop religious identity, and minister to the spiritual needs of the youth in your program. This workshop introduces circle worship and includes activities to help young people understand what is involved in planning and leading worship. Although participants are seated in a circle, the concept of circle worship goes beyond seating. Typically, it is led by laypeople who also sit in the circle and involves active participation by everyone present. Handout 10, Typical Elements of Circle/Youth Worship (page 135), describes this style of worship in detail and offers ideas for how to lead it.

Many Unitarian Universalist youth groups use circle worship at their meetings and conferences. In this program, circle worship offers an opportunity for youth to minister to each other and develop worship leadership skills. At the beginning of a Coming of Age session, circle worship can help center the group and ground it in its purpose; at the end of a session, it can help the group carry the week's learnings with them.

Time 60 minutes

Participant Goals

- experience worship that ministers to their spiritual and social needs
- develop skills and confidence in planning and leading worship
- grow in their capacity to take on responsibilities in a group

Materials

- chalice, candle, and matches
- a small table covered by a colorful cloth
- copies of Handouts 10 and 11, Typical Elements of Circle/Youth Worship and Typical Elements of a Traditional Worship Service (pages 135 and 137)
- worship resources, including hymnals and books of meditations

Preparation

- Recruit youth (and adults) to lead the components of this worship.
- Set up the altar cloth, chalice, candle, and matches in what you anticipate will be the center of a circle.
- Consider inviting guests to help instruct youth in worship planning. An older youth in the congregation who is experienced with circle worship and an adult youth advisor would be a great combination. Invite them to bring any sample Orders of Service they have previously used.

Opening 5 minutes

Use the opening ritual designed by the group.

Circle Worship Service 20 minutes

Let participants know that they will experience a style of worship called circle worship, which is sometimes called youth worship because many youth groups use this style. Mention that it is a style your group will be working with throughout the year and that participants will be invited to plan worships for future gatherings.

Gathering. Ask the group to stand in a corner of the room, and teach Hymn 389, “Gathered Here,” as a round. Once they have sung it through once, invite participants to sing it again and take hands with each other, and guide them to walk while singing. Lead the group so it forms a circle, and walk around the circle once or twice while singing. Then invite everyone to take a seat on the floor.

Opening. Light the chalice and share these words:

We light our chalice—this symbol of our faith tradition

To celebrate and give thanks for the community we are forming in Coming of Age.

May we learn, grow, and laugh together

In the love, support, and freedom of our Unitarian Universalist congregation.

Song. Teach Song 1023, “Building Bridges,” by the Women of Greenhorn Common in England, from *Singing the Journey*. If no one knows the tune, another song may be substituted.

Reading. Offer a few words about the process of coming of age, then offer this reading by Anne Hillman:

We look with uncertainty
Beyond the old choices for
Clear-cut answers
To a softer, more permeable aliveness
Which is every moment
At the brink of death;
For something new is being born in us
If we but let it.
We stand at a new doorway,
Awaiting that which comes . . .
Daring to be human creatures.
Vulnerable to the beauty of existence.
Learning to love.

Centerpiece. Lead the group in a guided check-in with the questions: What new doorways are you excited about crossing? What new doorways cause a bit of anxiety? Participants can speak to one or both questions. Gently remind the group to listen to one another with respect. If it is their first time checking in together, outline the guidelines for check-in before proceeding. Close the check-in by asking for a moment of silence to reflect on the blessings of sharing what we have in common and what makes us unique.

Song. Teach and sing the simple song “Dear Friends” (words below), which can be sung as a round with “Building Bridges.” If the song is unfamiliar, substitute another simple song, such as Hymn 16, “’Tis a Gift to Be Simple,” from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Dear friends, dear friends,
Let me tell you how I feel,
You have given me such treasures,
I love you so.

Closing. Close the worship with an affirmation such as “Amen,” “Blessed be,” or “Peace,” or another affirmation that suits your group well. You may extinguish the chalice at this time.

What Is Youth Worship All About? 15 minutes

Consider inviting a guest to facilitate this activity if leaders are not experienced in planning and leading worship.

Ask youth if they have ever experienced UU worship like the service you just held, perhaps at a youth conference or camp, or at Children’s Chapel with the religious educator. If some of them have, ask them to briefly tell the group how that service resembled the one they just participated in.

Distribute Handout 10, Typical Elements of Circle/Youth Worship. Ask volunteers to read through the elements and identify where each element was present in the worship service just conducted, if at all.

Ask youth if they have ever attended worship services with the congregation. If they have not, tell them you will be attending a service together in the future. Distribute Handout 11, Typical Elements of a Traditional Worship Service. Explain that the handout discusses typical segments of a congregational worship service and their purpose. Spend a few minutes reviewing the components listed, considering questions such as these: How do the two handouts compare? Can you match the activities of a typical circle worship service with those of a traditional worship service? Do some activities have the same purposes even if they have different forms?

Say in your own words,

It would be easy to just prepare an outline for worship that says “chalice lighting, hymn, reading, homily, meditation, hymn, closing.” However, as the two handouts demonstrate, different elements of worship, like hymns or meditations, serve different purposes. So, too, do different worship services. You might not want to design the same service for the first morning of summer camp for sixth graders as you would for midnight at the end of a weekend retreat of high school youth. For this reason, it is not enough to just know where to place the chalice lighting. Good worship design calls for an understanding of how the elements affect us and how they fit together.

If you or your guest brought Orders of Service from worship services you planned or led, share them and the experience with the group. Ask if there are any questions.

Planning Worship 15 minutes

If your group will be taking turns planning worship (in pairs or otherwise), ask people to sign up to lead worship at different group meetings and retreats. It is wise to have an adult leader partner with the groups to help them with this task, especially if your group is younger in age.

Keep a record posted. You might also e-mail the schedule to youth, parents, mentors, and other Coming of Age leaders not present.

Invite participants and leaders to identify resources that worship planners can use to assemble readings, songs, and activities. These resources may include collections of readings, hymnals, people (such as the religious educator, music director, and minister), organizations (such as CUUPS or the youth group), and websites.

If you invited guests to lead this workshop, they might share examples from their own experiences planning circle worship.

Closing Circle 5 minutes

Use the closing ritual designed by the group.