

UUCR Chalice Circle Program

# Participants' Handbook



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Participant's Handbook  
(10/05, adapted from Rev. Calvin Dames Small Group Ministry Brochure)  
(updated for 2013-2014, and again for 2014-2015)  
Cover art by Brian Charles Kohn.

## This Guide

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Welcome to your Chalice Circle. This is an important program being offered by UUCR for the ninth year and we are very happy you have chosen to participate. During church year 2004-05 those who were interested in how a program like this one would work for our community ran an experiment of sorts. The feedback was great and the experiences supported the commitment to formalize a program here. This experience has been repeated over and over again over the intervening years. We believe this program will support your personal growth - your exploration of spirit - and help build a stronger church community.

With a steady commitment to yourselves and your group we trust you will end this year of Chalice Circles with more aliveness and awareness.

Right now you may be experiencing excitement, nervousness, and have some questions.

So, we will start with the basics.

## What happens at a Chalice Circle meeting?

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The Chalice Circle meetings are led by a facilitator and each meeting has a set format and topic. Topics over the years have ranged from world religions to more personal topics such as friendship, community, nature, etc.

The Chalice Circle plan is simple:

Welcome and Chalice Lighting

A short period of Shared Silence

Check in and Sharing of Joys and Sorrows: Participants share themselves with the circle, typically focused on answering a simple question about their experiences. Then Participants share news of what has been happening in their lives. Each group develops its own customs as to length of sharing and how to respond. This portion of the meeting may expand from time to time when circumstances call for it.

Topic/Discussion: A reading or exercise will lay out a topic that will elicit thoughtful discussion and significant reflection.

Check out: This is a positive format for reflecting on how to carry the messages of the discussion into our daily lives.

Closing Words: This brings the formal meeting time to an end. Groups are encouraged to begin and end on time.

## Where do the groups meet?

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Each group decides whether to meet primarily in the facilitator's home or in member's homes or at church.

## How long to meetings last?

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Chalice Circles are designed to be 90 minutes and by common consent most groups are respectful of the time.

## How often do the Chalice Circles meet?

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Each group meets at least monthly and most groups are meeting twice a month, on a first and third or second and fourth schedule. The meetings run for the church year. We anticipate that there will be an annual reassignment period as our program grows.

## What is the role of the minister?

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The Minister coordinates this ministry of the congregation through a delegate. The designate helps recruit and train facilitators and meets with them each month to counsel and guide with a Chalice Circle format, assigning new members to existing groups, etc.

## What is expected of a small group participant?

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Participants are expected to bring a positive attitude, a willingness to share and to learn. What has emerged as the most important expectation that participants have for one another is to give the agreed upon meetings a high priority. While no one can make every meeting, members make every effort to attend.

## What does the facilitator do?

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The Chalice Circle Facilitator facilitates the life of the group. They make sure the group begins and ends on time, or they delegate someone to do so. They remind people of the next meeting and contact group members who miss a meeting, or delegate someone to do so. During the meetings, they read from the Chalice Circle plan and guide discussion, or delegate someone to do so. They meet each month with the minister or designate and other facilitators and help to maintain the connection between individual groups and the larger church.

## How does the Chalice Circle program grow?

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We are always in the process of forming new groups as people become interested in joining a group or as new people arrive. As new groups are formed, experienced group members step forward to become facilitators for new groups. And as the circumstances of people's lives change, the membership of a group may change from time to time. While it is sad to say goodbye, new members are warmly welcomed and expand the circle of connection.

## Who will know what I say?

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There is an expectation of confidentiality within groups. The level of comfort around confidentiality will vary within groups, so participants are encouraged to contribute to the "Covenant process" during one of the early meetings and to review this periodically. When there are significant pastoral concerns a Facilitator may ask if they can share that concern with the minister.

## How does the idea of Service fit in?

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From the beginning of our planning, the idea of service has been woven into the fabric of Chalice Circles. We ask that every group, over time, take on some kind of service in the church or in the community. This might be covering the sign up jobs for Sunday morning, adopting a family in need at Christmas or guiding a fundraiser during the church year. First, it helps to offset the natural tendency of small, intimate groups to become self absorbed and disconnected, and second, because service is a necessary aspect of a growing spiritual life.