

# Chalice Lighting Reflection

Jack Martin  
May 4, 2008

I light the Chalice this morning in celebration of Circle Ministry here at First Parish. The words that follow are not mine, but represent a collage of voices from different members of our Circle Ministry groups. From these voices, I have created this morning's chalice reflection. The thoughts and comments are the experiences of group members; what they have felt, reflected upon, and reported over the past year. I invite you to listen to their words and insights.

Circle Ministry has become the centerpiece of my experience at First Parish. It is the most precious aspect of my own spiritual expansion. It is a time twice a month for two hours to wrestle with topics that take me on an inward journey and causes me to be intentional and articulate in speaking my beliefs, questions, and experiences.

It is the Circle Ministry process that lets each one of us tell our own stories. There are no opinions or judgments, no right or wrong answers. We ask respectful questions; we provide generous listening; we allow each other to decide how deep we want to go within ourselves with each topic.

Some members in the group have done a great deal of self exploration; some have not done as much. These differences enrich our dialogue. They help us learn to be more thoughtful and exacting in the way we communicate.

Moments of self revelation are treated with the greatest respect. Once in a while a member of the group says something that even surprises them. In these special moments every member of the group is reminded of their own humanity and that there is no experience shared that we cannot empathize with, no fear that we cannot understand, no suffering we cannot care about, because we are all human; we are all vulnerable.

I am grateful to be in a group with people who have the courage to share their ideas, beliefs, and spiritual struggles. I have learned so much about my own inner faith as a UU and about myself personally, as well as the lives and the beliefs of the other members of my group. What a privilege it has been. I know that each member would give a different description of their group experience; but I also know they would tell you a variety of positive and wonderful results they have gained by being in their Circle Ministry group.

What we hear in these many different voices is the richness and the grace of small group ministry; and that is the immense gift that Circle Ministry has given to the 60 people who participated this year.