

DEEPENING

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE



Faith Forward: From Visitor to Leader Sample Session



First Unitarian Church of Dallas

Deepening Spiritual Practice (Updated March 2024)
Part of the *Faith Forward: From Visitor to Leader*
ADVANCED Path



First Unitarian Church of Dallas

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This program and additional resources are available at www.dallasuu.org

Spirituality and Daily Life

Session Two

SESSION OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Understand that spirituality can be woven into daily life, rather than being something that only lives in the times and places set apart from the everyday.
- Reflect on and identify ways to deepen their spiritual practice each day.

OVERVIEW

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Minutes</u>
Opening	3
Introduce the Session	2
Check-In	15
Activity: Our Daily Lives Brainstorm	10
Activity: Centering	5
Activity: Examen	20
Activity: Creating Sacred Space	10
Music: Holy Now	5
Closing	5

MATERIALS FOR SESSION

- Chalice, candle, and lighter
- Small bell or chime
- Paper and pens/pencils
- Copies of the hymnal *Singing the Living Tradition*, or photocopies of hymn #389 “Gathered Here” and #413 “Go Now In Peace”
- Audio recordings of “Gathered Here” and “Go Now In Peace” accompaniment, and technology to play them
 - **If offering online:** Consider using YouTube videos of the hymns.
- Audio recording or YouTube video of Peter Mayer’s song “Holy Now” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiypaURysz4>) and technology to play it

- Handouts: Spiritual Practices for Daily Life, Examen Questions
 - **If offering online:** These handouts are included in the slideshow. Share the handout files in the Zoom chat and by email as well.
- Optional handout: Family Faith Practices (available at: <https://dallasuu.org/families/family-faith-practices/>)

FACILITATOR PREPARATION

As a facilitator and spiritual guide, it is important to prepare yourself so that you are centered and present with the group. You are encouraged to spend a few moments before the participants arrive and the session begins doing some kind of spiritual practice, which helps you enter this space and opens you to the movement of the spirit within you and in the classroom. It could be as simple as a moment of silence and deep breathing. You could read a poem that is meaningful to you, or the poem “How Good to Center Down!” by Howard Thurman, which is used in this session. You could sing a song like “Spirit of Life” (#123 in *Singing the Living Tradition*) or “Meditation on Breathing” (#1009 in *Singing the Journey*).

OPENING (3 MINUTES)

If offering online: Share the Chalice Lighting slide so that everyone can participate in the opening words.

Light the chalice (or ask a participant to light it) and read the following:

*We light this chalice flame
To fill our cups with the fire of inspiration,
To ignite the spirit present here,
To illuminate what connects us, one to another, as one strong body.*

- Rev. Beth Dana

Invite participants to sing “Gathered Here,” #389 in *Singing the Living Tradition*. If someone knows it well or is a strong song leader, invite them to take the lead. Play the audio recording and sing it through twice.

Invite participants into a few moments of silence. Lead them in breathing in deeply, and then exhaling – three times. Then say, “now we begin.”

INTRODUCE THE SESSION (2 MINUTES)

Introduce this week's session: Spirituality and Daily Life. In this session, we seek to understand how spiritual practice can be an integral part of our everyday lives, rather than relegated to time set aside for spiritual moments or spiritual retreats. We can make the mundane sacred and the challenges of daily living sacred by approaching them with intention.

Remind participants of the class covenant before proceeding with the session.

If offering online: Show your class's covenant in the slideshow.

CHECK-IN (15 MINUTES)

Invite participants to check-in, answering the following questions:

1. Name?
2. How is your spiritual practice going – delights, challenges, discoveries?
3. Are there any modifications you would like to make to your goal for this class?

If offering online: Share the check-in slide for this session. With a large group, use the Zoom chat for check-in. With a smaller group, spoken check-in is doable within the time allotted. The facilitator should call on people in the order they appear on the facilitator's screen or call on the first person and then have each of them call on the next person when they're done.

ACTIVITY: Our Daily Lives Brainstorm (10 MINUTES)

Begin by acknowledging that there may be parts of our daily lives where spirit is present and we feel connected to God or the Holy. Lead a brainstorm, inviting participants to share areas of their daily life where spirituality is especially present. Write these on a flipchart or white board.

If offering online: Use the Zoom chat to brainstorm.

There are also moments or areas of our daily lives that feel devoid of spirituality. Examples could include: meetings at work, commute on a highway, washing dishes. Lead a brainstorm, inviting participants to share these moments and areas. At the end

of the brainstorm, ask participants if any of these listed *could*, with some intention, be reframed as spiritual practices, or could have spiritual practice integrated into them.

If offering online: Use the Zoom chat for the brainstorm, then invite a few participants to share aloud about intentionally reframing.

Read or share the following in your own words:

Our daily routines, celebrations, rituals, and practices can be expressions of our most important religious and spiritual values. They draw from many sources: your family cultural and religious background, our Unitarian Universalist tradition, and the new traditions you and your family have created. Everyday spiritual practices can be as simple as pausing throughout the day to center yourself, to pay attention to your body and your surroundings, or to remind yourself and return to what matters most.

Distribute the handout “Spiritual Practices for Daily Life,” and encourage participants to read it after the session and consider how these practices might change how they go about their day.

If offering online: Share the handout file in the Zoom chat and email it to participants after the session.

ACTIVITY: Centering (5 MINUTES)

Invite participants to get comfortable, and to close their eyes if they would like, as they listen to “How Good to Center Down!” by Howard Thurman. Thurman (1899-1981) was an African American preacher and theologian, educator, civil rights leader, and spiritual advisor to Martin Luther King, Jr.

How good it is to center down!

To sit quietly and see one’s self pass by!

The streets of our minds seethe with endless traffic;

Our spirits resound with clashings, with noisy silences,

While something deep within hungers and thirsts for the still moment
and the resting lull.

With full intensity we seek, ere the quiet passes, a fresh sense
of order in our living;

A direction, a strong sure purpose that will structure our confusion
and bring meaning in our chaos.

We look at ourselves in this waiting moment –
the kinds of people we are.
The questions persist: what are we doing with our lives? –
what are the motives that order our days?
What is the end of our doings?
Where are we trying to go?
Where do we put the emphasis and where are our values focused?
For what end do we make sacrifices?
Where is my treasure and what do I love most in life?
What do I hate most in life and to what am I true?
Over and over the questions beat in upon the waiting moment.
As we listen, floating up through all the jangling echoes of our turbulence,
there is a sound of another kind –
A deeper note which only the stillness of the heart makes clear.
It moves directly to the core of our being.
Our questions are answered,
Our spirits refreshed, and we move back into the traffic of our daily round
With the peace of the Eternal in our step.
How good it is to center down!

If offering online: Give participants the option to turn off their camera on Zoom while listening to the centering reading.

ACTIVITY: Examen (20 MINUTES)

Read or share the following in your own words:

Now that we have “centered down,” let’s engage in a spiritual practice called Examen. The Examen comes from the Ignatian spiritual tradition. St. Ignatius of Loyola was a Spanish priest and theologian in the 16th century who founded the Jesuit order. Known for his imaginative narrative practices in The Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius also suggested a daily practice of “examination of conscience.” Known as the Examen, this practice is a mindful review of your day, in which you reflect on your awareness of the sacred in everyday moments.

Begin with a moment of quiet. Ring a bell or chime. Invite participants to review the last 24 hours.

If offering online: Give participants the option to turn off their camera on Zoom during this practice.

Ask (with a pause between each question):

- Where have you been?
- Who was with you?
- What were you feeling in the morning? the afternoon? the evening?
- What were the sights, sounds, and smells of those moments?

Pause for a few moments of silence before proceeding.

Distribute the handout “Examen Questions” and explain that it includes a list of questions for them to use as part of the Examen practice. They do not need to answer *all* of the questions. These are a guide, and they are free to focus on whichever question(s) are most resonant for them at that moment. Give participants 10 minutes to reflect and write silently.

If offering online: This handout is included in the slideshow. Share the handout file in the Zoom chat as well.

Conclude the Examen by inviting participants to give thanks for the insights revealed in this process, and to lift up silently in prayer how they wish to respond. What new awareness do you wish for, and what do you hope to do differently?

Encourage participants to continue with this daily practice of Examen as often as they can, and to reflect on how it changes their perspective on the role and presence of the sacred in their everyday lives.

ACTIVITY: Creating Sacred Space (10 MINUTES)

Read or share the following in your own words:

Whenever an individual, family, or congregation gathers for ritual or worship, we create sacred space. In the sanctuary, we create sacred space with the seating arrangement, candles, art, words, and music that foster an experience of hospitality, beauty, and peace.

Invite participants to think about where they experience the holy. It could be inside a congregation, in nature, at their home, or in some other special place. Pause for a few moments of silence, giving them an opportunity to imagine themselves in this space.

If offering online: The questions below are included in the slideshow. Share in the Zoom chat if the group is large or share aloud if you have a smaller group.

Invite participants to share responses to these questions:

- What are the characteristics of that space?
- How does the environment engage the senses – sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste?
- How does the space reflect your faith or nurture it?

Encourage participants to create a home altar, if they don't already have one. The altar can contain objects and mementos that are meaningful to them. It could change with the seasons or as things happen in their lives.

Close by inviting a participant to read the following words from Jack Rathschmidt and Gaynell Bordes Cronin, from *Rituals for Home and Parish*:

Sacred space is the place where we meet others and tell our stories. It stirs our memories and becomes the occasion of hope...Earthy and material, it is also transcendent because it is created and sustained by personal and communal meaning. Sacred place is ordinary place ritually set apart to be extraordinary. It becomes sacred because of the ritual acts performed there.

If offering online: This quote is included in the slideshow.

MUSIC: Holy Now (5 MINUTES)

Before closing play the song "Holy Now" by Peter Mayer, a White American Unitarian Universalist musician. This song is a wonderful example of finding the holy throughout daily life.

If offering online: Have the video file already pulled up before class begins. Share your screen, select the window that has the video, and click the box next to "Share sound."

CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

Thank everyone for their participation in this session and let them know when the next one is.

If offering online: Show the homework slide. Email participants mid-week to remind them about the reflection homework.

Remind participants that the homework between this session and the next is to practice the Examen and to reflect on the presence of spirituality in their daily life. Next session, during the check-in, they will have an opportunity to share about how their perspective is shifting.

Invite one of the participants to lead a closing prayer for the group. Extinguish the chalice as they finish the prayer. Then turn on the audio recording of “Go Now in Peace” and invite the group to sing it twice, once with each wording.

Deepening Spiritual Practice – Session 2, Handout 1, Page 1

Spiritual Practices for Daily Life

There are many ways to incorporate spiritual practices into your daily life, in small but meaningful ways. Below are some examples.

In the morning:

When you wake up, give thanks for another day. Set intentions for your day. Review your calendar, asking for each engagement/meeting “Who do I want to be in this encounter?”

During your commute:

Turn off the radio/music and instead pray, sing, breathe, smile, think of things you’re grateful for, set a positive intention for your day or the evening.

Before you pick-up the phone:

Pause. Take a deep breath. Silently bless the person you’re about to interact with.

Take a mindful bathroom break:

Pay attention to your breath. Breathe deeply and attentively. Stretch your body. Wash your hands as if you are washing off the energy of the past moments and cleaning your hands in preparation for the coming moments. Set a positive intention for the next part of your day.

Walking meditation:

Walking your dog or walking between your car and work or the store is a perfect opportunity for a walking meditation. As you take each step, do so mindfully. Pay attention to the weight of your body, and the feel of the ground underneath you. For those unable to walk or who do so with difficulty: focus instead on how your body feels as it moves through the air.

Reminders:

Set a mindfulness reminder on your computer, phone, or watch to ring periodically throughout the day. Each time it rings, stop and breathe for just a moment. Close your eyes and visualize being in someplace you love, a meaningful place, some place that feels like home. Use all your senses to imagine that you are there.

Deepening Spiritual Practice – Session 2, Handout 1, Page 2
Spiritual Practices for Daily Life

Meals:

Say grace or a prayer of thanksgiving before eating each meal. If you are eating with others, you can say a prayer together.

Get Outside:

Each day, make a point of spending some time outside in nature. This keeps us connected to the web of creation of which we are a part.

Before Sleep:

Pray or meditate. Do the Examen exercise. Reflect on your day and set intentions for the next day.

Other everyday practices: journaling, art, coloring, music and chanting

Deepening Spiritual Practice – Session 2, Handout 2
Examen Questions

What did I feel good about today?

What was my biggest struggle today, or when did I feel sad, helpless or angry?

For what moment today am I most grateful?

For what moment today am I least grateful?

When did I feel most fully alive today?

When did I most feel life draining out of me?

When did I get in the flow?

When was I terribly out of the flow?

When did I give and receive the most love today?

When did I give and receive the least love today?

When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others, the Divine, and the universe?

When did I have the least sense of belonging?

What was today's high point?

What was today's low point?