

Boulder Valley UU Fellowship

Worship Elements

Putting together a worship service is a craft -- worship is an artistic response to the yearnings we have to express gratitude, awe, wonder, and connection to the whole of life -- its promise and its pain, its joy and its justice. And like all true art forms, it aims to shape a response in all who experience it--it aims for transformation.

Remember that on any given Sunday a percentage of the congregation is showing up in active grief. No matter how joyous the topic or celebratory the theme, always make room for those who are suffering. It is often suffering that brings people into a congregation for the first time.

The reverse is also true. No matter how serious the topic, no matter what world events have unfolded in the past week, always make room for hope.

Also, remember the newcomer. Rituals and acronyms that we assume 'everyone knows' can alienate a newcomer.

Worship elements can be divided into three kinds -- words, music, and silence. When you're imagining the flow of a service, it's good to alternate between them -- that is, try not to have two musical pieces back to back -- or try to alternate 'word' components between two different voices or have short silences or musical interludes between them to distinguish them, and give the gathered community time to transition from one element to another.

A worship service should flow from 'gathering' to 'connecting' to 'exploring' to 'returning'. These movements, discussed more fully on p. , aren't always completely linear, but 'returning' is essential!

*Some elements, such as the bowl singing, or the words and actions given in **bold** below, add a stabilizing ritual to our time together -- the basic structure that is followed every week allows folks to relax into the content more deeply.*

The other elements can all serve in some way to reinforce the theme of the service, and perhaps to highlight its connection to the theme of the month. When there is a clear thread running through the service, each element can allow the gathered community to access the theme through a different modality--a meditation, a stirring piece of music, the introduction to the offering, all can be used to highlight the theme.

The opening words ideally carry on the work of the Bowl, providing an entry into the topic that takes the congregation deeper into the present moment, as well as engaging them in the topic, intriguing them in what's to come. Often a poem is used--see "Using Poems in Worship." Sometimes, the worship associate offers a short reflection. The key here is to make sure it's not too long and that it has

depth, so that it remains invitational, catches the interest of the congregation, and engages more than just their minds.

Opening Words often end with something like:

Come, let us . . . (worship together), (explore the meaning of . . . together).

Words like these invite people into the conversation with the worship leaders.

HYMN

This hymn should be about ‘gathering’ or related to the theme of the service.

<https://sites.google.com/site/rocktavernuu/home/arts/hymns-in-singing-the-living-tradition>

This site offers help in picking hymns and knowing whether they will be “easy” to sing or not. See also BVUUF Singable Hymns (arranged by topic).

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VOmOLEX6f-s3lyDs8gR4Tg32OjFxS_PG_Tclbn5lmS1M/edit

READING OR REFLECTION OR MEDITATION

The reading or reflection (see below) may be offered here if the worship leaders want to explore the theme in multiple parts, or get into the theme earlier in the service. Be sure to have at least some moments of silence before the Candles of Community.

CANDLES OF COMMUNITY

*Candles of Community is a central connecting element to the service. In this ritual, we allow those who are in need of celebration or support to make it known to the congregation. Introductory words to Candles of Community can include thematic metaphors, and should clearly explain the process. Say something like:***THE BOWL SINGS**

Worship Associate stands in the middle of the dais and rings the singing bowl once. Allow the room to quiet down and feel centered. Minister and other worship leaders walk up to the dais.

PRELUDE OR HYMN

A short musical piece to help center folks for the service that follows.

WELCOME & LIGHTING THE CHALICE

*(please use this as a template -- not a script. Make it your own, while ensuring that the content is all presented. **Bolded words are best shared verbatim.**)*

Good morning and Welcome to the Boulder Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. I am _____. *(if it is Rev. Lydia's Sunday off, please say so.)*

No matter your age, your size, the color of your hair, your skin, you are welcome here.

No matter whom you love, or how you speak, or whatever your abilities, you are welcome here.

No matter where you live or how you make your living, you are welcome here.

No matter how long you've been away, nor how soon you return--

you are welcome here.

Whether you come with laughter in your heart or tears, you are welcome here.

You are invited to come with an open mind, a loving heart and willing hands.

You are welcome here.

I extend a **special welcome to all visitors today**, and hope that you find here a place that both nurtures your spirit and inspires you to help heal our world. Please feel free to **fill in the visitor form on the blue insert in your Sunday bulletin and drop it in the offering plate or leave it at the Welcome table after the service.**

Each month, we have an informal gathering for newcomers, called our '**chat**'. Its a chance for me and other leaders to get to know you and for you to get to know us and Unitarian Universalism. The next chat will be after the second service on **Sunday**, *(check BVUUF calendar for next date. If, as sometimes happens, there is no chat this month, re-word accordingly).*

Add any more announcements here -- KEEP THEM TO A MINIMUM!

We like to get to know all of our newcomers. If this is one of your first visits and you would like to do so, I invite you to stand and tell us your name and where you live so that we might better get to know you following our service. Are there any new people that would like to introduce themselves?

Please join me in saying our chalice-lighting words, which you will find in the Order of Service:

We light this chalice, for the warmth of love, the light of truth and the energy of action.

Ring Bowl again --

I now invite you to let the sound of the bowl draw you deeper into the present moment, and the company of this gathered community.

OPENING WORDS

And now, from this place of silence, I invite anyone who wishes to come forward, state your full name and where you live, light a candle or have our worship associate _____ light one for you, and, if you wish, briefly let us know what it is that is in your heart today. You may also choose to light a candle in silence.

The worship leader can light one or more candles if other pastoral events are present – or again, in connection to the theme. A candle that connects the congregation to events outside its doors can remind people of our responsibility to care and act on behalf of world challenges.

At the end of the candles, the worship leader speaks again:

And now I ask _____ to light one last candle for all those joys and concerns that remain in the silent sanctuary of our hearts, knowing that even in our silence, we are bound together in the web of life.”

If a pastoral prayer is to be offered, the worship leader may choose to wait to ask for one last candle at the end of the prayer.

PASTORAL PRAYER

The pastoral prayer allows the worship leader to lift up, in poetic fashion, some broad themes of gratitude, forgiveness, and desires for the world, as well as to name again, those themes that arose in the candles of community.

HYMN

A meditative, easy-to-sing hymn can function as a congregational response to this prayerful time, and can offer a bridge from the pastoral prayer to the introduction to the offering. The congregation often sits during this hymn.

OFFERTORY

The offertory is the piece of music played during the offering. The offering gives everyone in the congregation the opportunity to practice generosity –pledgers and non-pledgers alike. It is our custom to give away half of our offering plate each week.

The worship associate often introduces the offering:

It is our custom to practice generosity by giving half of our offering plate away each week. Today's half-plate goes to _____, who _____ (another detail or two)

Please give generously, as you always do. (Or some other closing line, like "Please give generously, if you can, to support our Fellowship and this worthy cause." OR "Please give generously as the plate passes.")

After the Offertory music, the offering plates are brought up front. If there is a representative from the half-plate organization, invite them up to receive the offering with you. As the plates are brought up, the hymn leader leads the congregation in singing:

From you I receive, to you, I give, together we share, and from this we live.

After receiving the plates, the worship leader says something like:

"For the work of the Fellowship and the work of _____, we dedicate our efforts and these our offerings."

OR

**We give these gifts freely, We receive these gifts gratefully,
We dedicate these gifts to the work of our congregation:
serving human wholeness, caring for our planet,
upholding religious freedom, welcoming the stranger,
loving one another.**

OR

**We dedicate these gifts to the work of this congregation;
weaving a tapestry of compassion and action,
faith and fellowship, hope and wholeness.**

**We dedicate these gifts to the work of this congregation,
And we affirm our lives within it.**

See

**<http://givingspeaks.com/congregations/words-for-the-dedication-of-the-offering/>
for more ideas...**

The offering plates are then placed on the altar.

READING OR REFLECTION

The reading or personal reflection from a worship associate introduces another voice into the topic for the service. Pay attention to which voices may not be heard – if the service is led by women, think about a male author, or if it's all older people, think about introducing the voice of a young adult. People of color, people from different parts of the world, different socioeconomic classes, LGBTQ writers, etc., should all be considered when choosing a reading. Also, of course, readings should reflect authorities on the topic, when possible – a Jewish writer on a Hanukkah service, for example, particularly if the worship leader is speaking from outside of their own tradition.

A personal reflection may also take the place of this reading spot. Personal reflections should not be longer than 4 minutes.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

A short (30 second) musical interlude is often included between two 'words' parts of the service. You can always ask the accompanist the morning of the service to insert them wherever you'd like.

REFLECTION

This second reflection is usually essentially a brief sermon, and the centerpiece for exploration during a 'typical' worship service. It should be supported by every other element in the service. During the sermon, the topic is explored in depth, engaging people intellectually and spiritually. Some questions to guide the crafting of sermons:

What story do I need to tell?

What story does the congregation need to hear?

What's bigger than the both of us? (Where is the holy in this topic?)

Personal experience and/or opinion is essential to creating a 'relational pulpit,' but one should always look for the universal story that the personal experience illuminates.

Sermons should be between 12 and 18 minutes long, depending upon what else is happening in the service.

POSTLUDE

The musical punctuation point! Affirms what's been said, moves people forward, back into the world. You may choose to have the musicians play something or have the congregation sing.

BENEDICTION (and extinguishing the Chalice)

The worship leader or worship associate extinguishes the chalice, saying
**We extinguish this chalice, but not the warmth of love, the light of truth,
and the energy of action.**

The worship leader then invites the congregation to stand and join hands or link arms, as they are comfortable doing, thus physically connecting them as they integrate what they've experienced. The benediction is a short paraphrase of the key point of the service, inviting them to 'go forth' and use some of the teachings. Holding hands reminds people they are not alone in their journeys.