Over the past six months, the Unitarian Universalist Women’s Foundation and Unitarian Universalist Women and Religion (UUWF-UUWR) has been engaged in strategic planning and organizing a merger. Part of the process is to initiate the "Listen to Our Voices" campaign, a series of Listening Circles that will provide us with your opinions and perspectives related to women’s leadership development and relationship building.

The Listening Workgroup has created this Listening Circle Guide so that you can hold conversations with other women, identifying issues important to you and various social settings. You can use it in your women's group, in a scheduled gathering at your congregation, or simply sitting down with another UU woman with a cup of tea. (Pandemic note: Phone and Zoom works great!) The guide provides directions on holding one-on-one or small group conversations. We also strongly encourage you and your group to follow the web links to a survey so that you can share opinions.

**Background**

UU Women’s Federation and UU Women and Religion are in the process of merging, reorganizing, and re-visioning. To that end, we’re very interested in hearing what UU women in the US want from their national UU women’s organization.

**Purpose**

We’ve created a survey to ask that important question and to gather some information about you, your congregation, and any UU women’s groups you may belong to.

**Intent**

It is our intention to listen to a wide variety of UU women at the grassroots level.

**Request**

We hope you will gather with other UU women in a Listening Circle format, asking each other the questions – in the main group, in pairs, or in small groups.

**Effects**

The merged organization of UU Women will use the results to guide our trajectory for the future.

**Gratitude**

Thank you for participating in this web of connection!

**Preparation**

- Read **Facilitator Tips** (at the end of this document).
- Read **Guidelines for an enjoyable group** (at the end of this document). Decide what guidelines you’d like to propose for your group, to help create a healthy setting for conversation.
- Find a volunteer to take notes during the meeting.
- Publicize.
Outline for your gathering
(Feel free to adapt to suit your group needs and preferences.)

Opening reading and/or chalice lighting of your choice

Read aloud the Background, Purpose, Intent, Request, Effects, and Gratitude above. Let everybody know that the questions asked today are all in a survey, which they will be asked to fill out later. UUWF - UUWR want to hear your individual voices, but we're also excited that you are gathered together and can hear each other.

Check-in. Ask each person to say their name and a brief answer to a check-in prompt. Prompt suggestions (choose one): What does "feminism" mean to you? Who is your favorite feminist forebear? How is Unitarian Universalism (or your congregation) a feminist community and faith? (Or make up your own prompt.)

Guidelines. Read aloud the Guidelines you'd like to propose (decided in advance by facilitators; suggestions below), and invite feedback or suggestions.

Group discussion. We suggest you break out into smaller groups if you have more than 10 participants. (If you are using Zoom, instructions are at https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206476313.) Ask the following questions:

1. Does your congregation have any women’s groups?
   a. If yes, please describe. What is working well and what would you like to see improve?
   b. If no, what do you want from a congregational women's group?
2. Who is very familiar with the UUWF? UU Women and Religion?
   a. If people raise their hands, ask them to share their understanding.
   b. Supplement with information at the end of this document.
3. What would you want most from a national organization for UU women?
4. Would you like to participate in UU women’s retreats and workshops locally, regionally or nationally. (in-person and online) And, if so, what themes and focuses would you like to explore in such a group setting?
5. Is there anything else you’d like to share with the UUWF and UUWR?

If you broke into small groups, reconvene and ask each small group to share their answers. The notetaker should take notes and enter them here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/uuwfnotes

Survey. Ask every participant to fill out the survey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BNGZHDN
We suggest you make time for this during your gathering. If participants are not finished after 5 minutes, encourage them to finish on their own after the closing reading. Please ask your notetaker to enter notes from the Listening Circle at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/uuwfnotes.

Closing reading of your choice.
Completion

Thank you for facilitating! Make sure you and your notetaker fill out your own surveys if you didn't get a chance to do so during the gathering.
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BNGZHDN

If your group used paper surveys, please mail them to:
UU Women's Federation
3322 N. 92nd Street, Milwaukee, WI 53222

You may also scan paper surveys and email them to: info@uuwr.org

Background on the UU Women's Federation

www.uuwf.org

UUWF Mission: Advancing justice for women and girls and promoting their spiritual growth

Advocacy
We strive to amplify the voices of Unitarian Universalist women in the areas of justice, equity, and spiritual growth. We keep an eye out for initiatives to which we can add our weight, such as amicus briefs, letters to legislators, and public statements in support of survivors, abortion rights, and equal pay. We then share our efforts through social media and a quarterly newsletter. We are enthusiastically exploring ways to engage more stakeholders in our activities, and would be eager to hear about your advocacy and ways we can boost your impact. Let us know what you're up to and how we can help.

Funding Programs
The UUWF funds programs that advance equity and justice for women and girls in both action and theology, through Equity & Justice and Margaret Fuller Grants, respectively. Recent examples include funding for Black Lives UU, accessible menstrual products to rural communities, various programs run by Filipina UUs, prison ministry curricula, and anthologies of Black female clergy scholarly work. Additionally we are stewards of the Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley Scholarship program, which provides direct financial support to aspirants or candidates to the Unitarian Universalist ministry, or candidates in the UUA's religious education or music leadership programs, who identify as women of color, Latina, or Hispanic. These programs are made possible by the endowment bestowed upon us by generations of powerful women as well as contemporary Unitarian Universalist women and women's groups across the country.
Background on UU Women and Religion

www.uuwr.org

The Women and Religion Movement is alive and well in the 21st Century. A grassroots project started by lay leaders in the 1970s as an effort to promote examination of religious roots of sexism and patriarchy within the UUA and beyond, UU Women and Religion officially began as a task force following the unanimously-passed WOMEN AND RELIGION RESOLUTION at the 1977 UUA General Assembly. Although the Task Force was eventually sunsetsed, the movement still exists in UU Districts that hold Women & Religion programs and woman-focused gatherings. It exists at General Assembly, where UUW&R has an annual gathering and a booth in the display area. And it lives in the hearts and lives of women and men who have been touched by the many changes inspired by this movement. "We do not want a piece of the pie. It is still a patriarchal pie. We want to change the recipe!" -- Rosemary Matson

Resources
UUW&R maintains an online and in-person feminist Store, featuring classic and new curricula, books, music and other resources by and for UU women.

Facilitator Tips
condensed from Cakes for the Queen of Heaven 2007 ed.
Courtesy of Rev. Shirley A. Ranck

Decide if you will be the sole facilitator or if you will work with a co-facilitator, which allows each facilitator to participate more fully in the process than if you are facilitating on your own.

(Decide whether or not you want to have refreshments.)

It is important to provide a sense of closure and accomplishment, an opportunity to celebrate your shared experience and learnings.

Participants may want to participate in planning and leading the opening and closing.

As everyone knows who has ever led a curriculum or small group, there is no guaranteed process by which facilitators and groups create an environment that is supportive, open, and growth-producing. There are processes, however, that have been used effectively in a variety of settings. Here are some guidelines out of the collective experience of facilitators we hope will be helpful to you.

- Plan to arrive before the participants and have all equipment and materials ready for the session. This helps participants to feel comfortable and contributes to an organized, relaxed flow in the … process.
• Arrange for a comfortable, attractive meeting space appropriate to the size of the group. The physical setting can contribute greatly to harmonious interactions among participants. [If using Zoom, think ahead about your backdrop and the necessary virtual "choreography."]
• Begin and end the [session] on time.
• Know the material.
• Get to know participants and help participants get to know one another. Taking time to build group rapport and trust is an essential component… It can be helpful at the beginning … to invite participants to relate a personal observation they wish to share with the group. [If you are using Zoom and have a group of more than 10, we recommend using breakout rooms, with a facilitator in each room. Reconvene at the end and ask for summaries from each breakout group.]
• Listen to the group and encourage clarification. Try to hear the questions behind the one posed.
• Respect each participant’s contribution or right to keep silent and remind the group to do likewise. Guarantee the right to PASS.
• Support group trust by having participants agree to keep personal confidences that have been shared within the group. No one wants their story retold elsewhere.
• Strive to keep an individual or small group from dominating the discussion. What is happening? Has the topic released an issue of great concern? Are there individuals who feel threatened and are using this means to keep control? Uncovering a hidden agenda can be a key to new understanding.

**Encouraging participation**
*From Sharing the Floor: "Some Strategies for Effective Group Facilitation"*
https://www.uua.org/re/adults/group-facilitation
*plus other ideas*

Some people are quick to speak up; others need time for reflection. Some are comfortable competing for the floor; others are not and will not. Here are some techniques to equalize opportunities to speak:

*Moment of Reflection.* After you have raised a question or topic, ask everyone to reflect silently for a minute (or two) and collect their thoughts. Do not allow anyone to break this silence except to ask a clarifying question. Then break the silence by calling on someone who has not spoken at length or by using one of the options below.

*Around the Circle.* Go around the circle with each person who wishes to do so speaking briefly to the topic, starting with someone who has not previously spoken at length.

*Mutual Invitation.* After a participant shares, they invite the next person to share. When invited, participants can share, 'pass for now', or 'pass' and then invite the next person.
Raising Hands. Ask the group to agree that they will raise their hands when they wish to speak, refraining from interrupting when someone else has the floor. The facilitator makes a note of the order in which people raise their hands and periodically indicates who will have the floor next. For example, “Mary, John, Bill, then Cathy.” If this system seems “juvenile” or controlling, try it. It is actually very fair, inclusive, efficient, and relaxing because people can turn their attention to speaking and listening with respect rather than competing for the floor and trying to hold it against the threat of interruptions. A word of caution: it is important that the facilitator facilitate, and not take advantage of the process. A facilitator who wishes to participate in the discussion, must symbolically raise a hand and add themselves to the list.

Progressive Stack using the chat. (This requires some facilitation, so it’s best if you have two facilitators: one who can watch the chat while the other monitors conversation.) Participants use the chat to put themselves on the "stack" or "speakers' queue." "Progressive" stack is a commitment to give preference to marginalized groups, so people are called on not necessarily first come-first served. The facilitator moves marginalized people -- or people who haven't spoken yet - to the top of the list. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive_stack](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive_stack)

Ask that people who have not yet spoken go next. Remember, this is an invitation; it should not feel coercive or put anyone on the spot.

Body language. Watch for body language indicating that someone wants to speak, but is hesitant to compete for the floor. Call on them in an encouraging way.

Eye Contact. Try to avoid making eye contact with participants who have been talking too much. It is a green light for them to speak. (It is surprisingly hard to avoid looking at the person you have come to expect to speak out.)
Guidelines for an enjoyable group

1. Speak only for yourself. Use “I” messages.
2. Share what is comfortable.
   Do not pressure others to share.
3. Feel free to pass.
4. Do not give advice.
5. Tell your own story.
6. Be open-minded and nonjudgmental.
7. Wait until the person speaking has finished before you speak (pass the rattle as necessary).
8. Ask for what you need.
9. Hold the stories from the circle sacred and close to your heart. What is said in the circle stays in the circle.
10. Avoid chit-chat and dig deep!


UUA Facilitator Resources:

Accessibility for Workshop Presenters (for in-person gatherings):
https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/accessibility-guidelines

Group Facilitation:
https://www.uua.org/re/adults/group-facilitation

UU Women & Religion Facilitator Resources:
The Circle Model of Shared Leadership by Elizabeth Fisher
https://www.uuwr.org/new-store/40-books/231-shared-leadership

Questions? Please contact us
uuwf@uuwf.org or info@uuwr.org

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