

Milestones Circle: Sharing Our Lives Now

April 27, 2025

Newcomer Welcome & Introductions: The what, who, and why of the Milestones Circle. Older adulthood is a time to take stock of one's journey and to affirm that which is of most importance. It can be a rich time in the lives of adults- a time when we are often open to new learning and discovery, a time of deepening friendships and relationships, a time of theological reflection as we explore questions of meaning and purpose. The Milestones Circle is an open, drop-in small group for older adults to meet, share thoughts and concerns, and receive support and friendship in a UU setting.

Our proposed Covenant Statement: *(to be read silently and discussed if there are questions or concerns.)*

- We will use “I” statements when speaking and avoid interrupting others while they are speaking.
- What we say in this Circle will be held in confidence so that we all will feel free to share our truth openly.
- We will listen with compassion and empathy because we understand that all human beings are fallible and need the kindness offered in friendship.
- We acknowledge the right to pass or not share, when that feels appropriate.

As an experiment, we have agreed that if our group exceeds 12 in number we will try splitting into 2 groups for the discussion and coming back together for our sharing of final thoughts. We hope that this move satisfies our goal of allowing enough time for everyone to thoroughly express their personal points of view on the topics.

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What would you want said about you after your passing?

What might you want engraved on your tombstone?

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting: these words from Rev. Dr. Kate Walker, UU minister of First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh

With courage we turn to look, with fear and love pulling us forward, death will greet us one day. We look, but we do not welcome, not this time, not next time, we only look, with courage.

Song The Earth is Our Mother (Native American Song)

**The earth is our mother,
she will take care of us. (2x)**

Hey yanna, ho yanna, hey yan yan. (2x)

**Her sacred ground we walk upon,
with every step we take. (2x)**

Hey yanna, ho yanna, hey yan yan. (2x)

**The earth is our mother,
we must take care of her. (2x)**

Hey yanna, ho yanna, hey yan yan. (2x)

Check-in: Participants are invited, as we go around our circle, to state your name and to share something important in your life currently. Because we are a community of care, also indicate if there is anything that you might expressly need from this group to address what you have shared. *We might need to take a significant amount of time in our check in with the goal of becoming known and knowing our fellow participants. (approx 20 -30 minutes)*

Following the check in, If necessary, the group will split into two for today's discussion.

Reading no. 1:

If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life. For life and death are one, even as the river and sea are one.

—Kahlil Gibran

Reading no. 2:

“We all know that something is eternal. And it ain’t houses and it ain’t names, and it ain’t earth, and it ain’t even the stars . . . everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you’d be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There’s something way down deep that’s eternal about every human being.”

— Thornton Wilder, Our Town

Reading no. 3: Excerpt from Love and Death, by the Rev. Forrest Church, UU minister, deceased

Death is central to my definition of religion. Religion is our human response to the dual reality of being alive and having to die. We are not the animal with advanced language or tools as much as we are the religious animal. Knowing that we must die, we question what life means. The answers we arrive at may not be religious answers, but the questions death forces us to ask are, at heart, religious questions: Where do I come from? Who am I? Where am I going? What is life’s purpose? What does this all signify?

Death is not life’s goal, only life’s terminus. The goal is to live in such a way that our lives will prove worth dying for. This is where love comes into the picture. The one thing that can’t be taken from us, even by death, is the love we give away before we go.

Questions for your reflection:

1. An epitaph is a meaningful tombstone tribute to someone who has died. It can be hard to decide what to write on a headstone or cemetery monument; how can brief epitaphs ever truly capture the emotion involved when saying goodbye?
2. Who might be charged to write your epitaph? What do you think they might be likely to say?
3. What would you want said about you after your passing?

Silent reflection (2-3 minutes) You are encouraged to jot down your thoughts if that is helpful.

Sharing/Listening round our Circle We will first go around our Circle to ensure that everyone gets an equal opportunity to speak. *Please be mindful to allow time for everyone to share. (approx. 20 minutes)*

Open Discussion/reflections We will share additional thoughts on our theme, this time in no particular order. (approx 10 minutes)

Returning together: We invite each group to provide a synopsis from your separate discussions. (approx. 10 minutes)

Possible further information? As time allows, please share your recommendations of books, movies, writers, websites, etc. that offer more on today's theme.

These resources may be helpful to you:

- Download the [Conversation Starter Kit](#) from the Conversation Project for help in talking with loved ones about end-of-life issues.
- [Six Feet Under](#), HBO dramatic comedy series created and produced by Alan Ball. It features a California family who own and operate a funeral home. Many public libraries have the DVDs.
- [Love and Death: My Journey through the Valley of the Shadow](#) was the last book written by Unitarian Universalist minister Forrest Church (Beacon, 2009).
- www.legacy.com › advice › 100-best-examples-of-epitaphs [100 Memorable Epitaphs and Headstone Quotes - Legacy.com](#)

Closing Words and Extinguishing the Chalice:

And so I shall go, in time, as all Go
and greet this sustaining earth with gratitude
and pray I am worthy and have served Her well.

— Melitta Haslund, from "A Shovel Full of Earth"

Next meeting will be on Sunday, May 25, 2025 at noon.

Topic will be *Choosing happiness in a youth oriented culture, and/or as we face unexpected changes and challenges.*