

Discussion Guide for

Beyond Welcome: Building Communities of Love

Linnea Nelson



Six-Session Book Discussion

Essays for Each Discussion:

Session 1: Belonging

“Introduction” by Linnea Nelson

“A Circle of All” by Rev. Manish Mishra-Marzetti

“A Welcoming Congregation Must Be Accessible” by Julie Romero

Session 2: Multiculturalism

“Leading Equitable Multicultural Communities” by Dr. Janice Marie Johnson

“Built Through Trust” by Rev. Manish Mishra-Marzetti

“Ecstasy in Arab Musical Spaces” by Rev. Summer Albayati

“Beyond the ‘Both/And’ by Rev. Leslie Takahashi

Session 3: Ever-Expanding Love

“Nurturing Mission-Based Arts Programs” by Laura Weiss

“Social Class and Beloved Community” by Denise Moorehead

“No One Is Outside the Circle of Love” by Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen

Session 4: Making a Shift

“Worshipping in Fullness and Truth as Black UUs” by Rev. Mykal O’Neal Slack

“A Conscious Act to Stay Engaged” by Dr. Jenice L. View

“Sparking the White Supremacy Teach-In” by Aisha Hauser

“A Constellation of Care for All Genders” by Rev. Theresa I. Soto

Session 5: Family Ministry

“Kids Talk About Community” by Nichole Hodges-Abbasi, Zachi and Tobi Abbasi

“The Magic Pool of UU Youth Culture” by L. C. Magee

“Embracing Family Ministry” by LB Brown

Session 6: Welcoming Skills

“Sacred Cyberspace” by Linnea Nelson

“Covenant and Community” by Julica

Hermann de la Fuente and Christina Rivera

“Creating Robust Communities of Care” by Sky Gavis-Hughson

For this six-session exploration of *Beyond Welcome: Building Communities of Love*, keep a hard copy or online journal to respond to three types of questions:

- the personal reflection questions preceding each essay,
- the community questions after each essay, and
- the follow up questions asked in the discussion group.

Tips for Participating in the Discussion of *Beyond Welcome: Building Communities of Love.*

Plan on 90 minutes for each discussion, with larger groups perhaps needing two hours.

Some things to keep in mind:

- If your community has a known welcoming or belonging issue, continue to explore all of the essays. You have probably tried to address a known issue already, so exploring and valuing related barriers might offer new insights.
- The questions in this guide are generally based on appreciative inquiry to build on successes in your community.
- The discussions may bring disparate viewpoints about the significance of specific barriers to belonging. Listen deeply and pause to comment and discuss harm.
- Your group might focus on one question or issue. The additional follow-up questions for each session can be used to broaden the discussion.
- You can conduct the sessions online or in person. If you have excellent tech equipment and support, you can also offer multiplatform.

Chalice Lighting

Under the Night Sky by Kristin Moyer

Once more we form the circle
Shoulder to shoulder
Against the cold night
Breaths rising
Flames passing
Candle to candle
Hands sheltering the tender light
Against the night wind
Eyes reflecting flame
Voices lifting "Silent Night"
And when my light blows out
Again
You offer yours

Covenant

We will

- Come prepared to listen deeply and share honestly.
- Welcome disparate opinions.
- Keep the words of others confidential.
- Pause when harm occurs to discuss.
- Add as needed.

Ten Steps to Facilitating

1. Once the group has gathered, invite everyone to be in a circle (or if online, note that the online boxes can be seen as making a sacred circle).
2. Read the final reading in *Beyond Welcome: Building Communities of Love*, “We Hold Hope Close” by Rev. Teresa Soto as someone lights a chalice.
3. To begin each session, provide this welcome ritual, which includes the lighting of a chalice and a welcoming of each person individually by saying the following to one person in the group. Ask what name and pronouns they would like to be referred to before saying:
 - a. “Welcome to the group, *name*.”
 - b. “*Name*, your presence here is valued.”Note: you can do this with each person, or write the words out and invite each person to welcome the next until you, as the facilitator are also welcomed.
4. Take two minutes of silence for everyone to feel fully present and to let go of whatever distractions they do not need for this discussion. Then read the prepared covenant and ask if anyone wants to add or change anything. Confirm agreement. You can use your congregational covenant if you prefer.
5. Open the discussion with an invitation to respond to a personal reflection question you have chosen as found in the book and in the session guide provided.
6. Move to the community question related to the same essay.
7. As helpful, ask the follow-up questions, or questions of your own to further the conversation.
8. As you close each session, draw a large circle on a white board ([digital whiteboard](#)) or similar and invite people to write a phrase that captures their understanding, inspiration, and hope from the discussion.
9. Extinguish the chalice with the words of Kristin Moyer, “Under the Night Sky” as found before the Introduction to *Beyond Welcome: Building Communities of Love*.
10. Recognize that this is an exploration of issues and can be used to begin more comprehensive systemic planning.

Questions for Discussion

Session 1: Belonging

1.1 “Introduction” by Linnea Nelson

Pre-Intro Personal Reflection Question:

What works well in how your community embraces belonging?

Post-Intro Community Question:

What is considered the normative make up of your congregation? Note that you might consider a variety of demographic information.

1.2. “A Circle of All “ Rev. Manish Mishra-Marzetti

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

Who do you trust?

Post-Essay Question:

In your community, to whom is belonging easily conferred? By extension, to whom is belonging rarely conferred or conferred with greater difficulty?

1.3. “A Welcoming Congregation Must Be Accessible” Julie Romero

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

What have you done to make your community, workplace or home more accessible to more people?

Post-Essay Community Question:

How do you know what the physical barriers to participation in your congregation are?

Session 1 Follow-Up Questions:

- A. What is the process for requesting accessibility in your community? Is this clear and available?
- B. How would someone know they are welcome the first time they attend your community for worship or an event?
- C. How do all people know they are welcome after the first few visits?

Session 2: Multiculturalism

2.1. "Leading Equitable Multicultural Communities" by Dr. Janice Marie Johnson

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

Why do you yearn for (in the words of Dr. Mark Hicks) a "multiracial, multicultural, theologically and generationally diverse spiritual community?"

Post-Essay Community Question:

What are the next steps toward making your community "multiracial, multicultural, theologically and generationally diverse"?

2.2. "Built Through Trust" by Rev. Manish Mishra-Marzetti

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

What are the requirements of membership in the places you belong?

Post-Essay Community Question:

What fears might be lurking behind resistance to change in your community?

2.3. "Ecstasy in Arab Musical Spaces" by Rev. Summer Albayati

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

How does the music in your congregation engage you spiritually?

Post-Essay Community Question:

Why might your congregation engage more fully in music that embraces the kinds of cultural and emotional responses?

2.4. "Beyond the 'Both/And'" Rev. Leslie Takahashi

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

What assumptions do you find people often make about you in your community?

Post-Essay Community Question:

What common phrases or assumptions could be reframed as "both/and" or "multi/and" in your community?

Session 2 Follow Up Questions:

- A. Where do you see multiculturalism embraced in your community?
- B. How are decisions about inclusion made in your community?
- C. What is enriching to all in a more multicultural community?

Session 3: Ever-Expanding Love

3.1 “Nurturing Mission-Based Arts Programs” by Laura Weiss

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

Who are the leaders in your arts community?

Post-Essay Community Question:

How might the arts expand leadership in your community?

3.2 “Social Class and Beloved Community” by Denise Moorehead

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

When did you first become aware of class differences?

Post-Essay Community Question:

How can our Unitarian Universalist faith community build on class differences to become stronger and more welcoming?

3.3 “No One Is Outside the Circle of Love” by Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

How do you define your own circle of love?

Post-Essay Community Question:

How does harm get passed through your community?

Session 3 Follow-Up Questions:

- A. What is the most radical decision your community has done to be more inclusive?
- B. What areas of your community are in need of thinking outside the box?
- C. Who are the allies for change in your community?

Session 4: Making a Shift

4.1 “Worshipping in Fullness and Truth as Black UUs” by Rev. Mykal O’Neal Slack

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

What do you hope for in Unitarian Universalist worship services?

Post-Essay Community Question:

What is missing from worship in your community that would allow bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits to fully engage and belong?

4.2 “A Conscious Act to Stay Engaged” by Dr. Jenice L. View

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

What keeps you in Unitarian Universalism?

Post-Essay Community Question:

What is missing from worship in your community that would allow bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits to fully engage and belong?

4.3 “Sparking the White Supremacy Teach-In” by Aisha Hauser

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

If you are centered in your Unitarian Universalist community, what privilege do you experience? If you are not someone who is centered, what is your experience?

Post-Essay Community Question:

How will you center people with marginalized identities in your Unitarian Universalist community?

4.4 “A Constellation of Care for All Genders” by Rev. Theresa I. Soto

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

Where do you process your learning about anti-oppression?

Post-Essay Community Question:

How does your community prioritize trans and nonbinary inclusion? What learning needs to happen, and how are the opportunities for learning unfolding?

Session 4 Follow-Up Questions

1. What needs to shift in your community?
2. Who will benefit?
3. Which identities will find it most difficult to change?

Session 5: Family Ministry

5. 1 “Kids Talk About Community” by Nichole Hodges-Abbasi, Zachi Abbasi (age 10), and Tobi Abbasi (age 9)

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

What does community mean to you?

Post-Essay Community Question:

What would you say are three core ways of building community in a congregation?

5.2 “The Magic Pool of UU Youth Culture” by L. C. Magee

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

What are your own memories of community as a youth?

Post-Essay Community Question:

How do you measure the degree to which the youth of your community trust that community?

How might you increase or expand their trust?

5.3 “Embracing Family Ministry” by Laura Beth Brown

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

What is your childhood experience of worshipping as a family?

Post-Essay Community Question:

How is your community the antidote to individualistic society?

Session 5 Follow-Up Questions:

1. Why do we want more families in our congregations?
2. What are we doing to attract and engage families?
3. Why might families not stay after visiting a few times?

Session 6: Welcoming Skills

6.1 “Sacred Cyberspace” Linnea Nelson

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

What kinds of online experiences have created community for you?

Post-Essay Community Question:

How can you bring deep listening and more intentional engagement to your online programs?

6.2 “Covenant and Community” by Julica Hermann de la Fuente and Christina Rivera

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

What value do we place on shared covenant?

Post-Essay Community Question:

Look at a covenant you created. What about it might you want to revisit after reading this essay?

6.3 “Creating Robust Communities of Care” by Sky Gavis-Hughson

Pre-Essay Personal Reflection Question:

Do you see yourself as a giver or a recipient of care in your communities? What holds you back from receiving or offering care?

Post-Essay Community Question:

Think about the ways your congregation is set up to meet the basic human need of care. Consider all your congregational structures and activities: leadership structure, worship, budgeting, and more. Does your congregation approach care with a mindset of scarcity or with one of abundance?

Session 6 Follow-Up Questions:

- A. How does your community engage with covenants?
- B. What does your community approach with a mindset of abundance?
- C. What are your own expectations for care in your community?