

Visiting a Dying Friend—May 2014 UUFVB Covenant Groups

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community, and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Opening Reading: “The Larger Circle” (UU hymnal responsive reading #646)

We clasp the hands of those that go before us,
And the hands of those who come after us.
We enter the little circle of each other’s arms
And the larger circle of lovers, whose hands are joined in a dance,
And the larger circle of all creatures,
Passing in and out of life, who move also in a dance,
To a music so subtle and vast that no ear hears it.
Except in fragments. (Wendell Berry)

Topic Exploration

When visiting a dying friend, especially for the first time since his/her condition has been considered terminal, it is natural to be preoccupied with worries. What should we talk about? From patients and caregivers the advice is much the same: Listen carefully. Follow your friend’s lead. Respond to his/her comments without judgment or expectation. Be free with expressions of love and affection. What our friend may need most is to feel that the friendship/love we share is unchanged. At a time when most individuals feel alone, we can try to convey our willingness to *be* with them, sharing their experiences. As one Hospice booklet puts it: “Think of yourself as someone who ‘walks with’ not ‘behind’ or ‘in front of’ the dying person.” Source: Hospice booklet, *Helping a Friend Who is Dying* by Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt

Questions/Sharing

1. Almost all of us are called upon to visit a dying friend or family member, no matter what their age. It’s a common task but what it requires is uncommon -- devoted and thoughtful effort. Visiting a dying friend may present new and different challenges each time we do it. How can we truly be *present* to provide help and comfort? Can relating to grief and death help us explore our own feelings, and foster our spiritual growth?
2. Sometimes our own health or personal problems make us unable to cope with visiting a dying friend. Guilt about this may add to the weight of our problems. Have you shared a

friend's final days? What were some of the things that seemed of greatest comfort? Did these things change as death approached? If you are unable to be present, are there other ways to support dying friends?

3. We may feel numbness and profound sorrow as we confront the reality of losing a friend. Yet, this time can offer a profound opportunity for spiritual growth. Death comes to every one of us. Accepting death, and preparing ourselves to live fully in the time remaining to us, are spiritual tasks. Though we have to do these by ourselves, we are not alone! Covenant groups can provide sanctuaries for exploring our own feelings, and listening to others. Do you feel the need to devote more time and thought to your own mortality? Have you taken practical steps to deal with your own end-of-life issues?

Check-out and reflection on today's session

Closing Reading "We Need One Another" (UU hymnal responsive reading #468)

We need one another when we mourn and would be comforted.

We need one another when we are in trouble and afraid.

We need one another when we are in despair, in temptation, and need to be recalled to our best selves again.

We need one another when we would accomplish some great purpose, and cannot do it alone.

We need one another in the hour of success, when we look for someone to share our triumphs.

We need one another in the hour of defeat, when with encouragement we might endure, and stand again.

We need one another when we come to die, and would have gentle hands prepare us for the journey.

All our lives we are in need, and others are in need of us.

(George E. Odell)

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping