

# Notes to the Leader for Session G34 – The Need for Religious Community

## About This Topic

One of our goals as a church is to develop a stronger sense of being a “spiritual commune.” On a gut level, we know that we wouldn’t come if we didn’t gain something from being with each other—and we wouldn’t stay together if we didn’t give something back. But we’d like to promote a stronger awareness of what it really means to be in community together—both the blessings and the responsibilities. That’s what this session aims to do, along with the next session, G35 – Our Ministry in the Church Community, and a later session, G60 – Creating a Caring, Inclusive Community.

Much of the material in these sessions comes from “Belonging: The Meaning of Membership,” a report written by the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Commission on Appraisal—its most recent publication after a four-year study. The Commission on Appraisal’s work is incredibly important to the UUA. We recommend their web site, [www.uua.org/coa](http://www.uua.org/coa). The report can be found at [www.uua.org/coa/reports\\_issued.html](http://www.uua.org/coa/reports_issued.html). (FYI, there is a full study guide that they published for small groups on this report, which is at [www.uua.org/coa/belongingstudyguide.pdf](http://www.uua.org/coa/belongingstudyguide.pdf).)

Here is some information from their web page:

The Commission is charged to "review any function or activity of the Association which in its judgment will benefit from an independent review and report its conclusions to a regular General Assembly." The Commission meets four times a year--once at General Assembly, and three working meetings held in Boston and other locations throughout the continent. During most of our meetings, we hold open hearings to which we invite local UUs so we can hear as many of the different voices of our movement as possible.

### Mission Statement

Grounded in the living tradition of our free faith, yet charged with acting independently, the Commission on Appraisal’s mission is to provoke deep reflection, energizing and revitalizing Unitarian Universalism.

The Commission on Appraisal has studied and published reports on some important topics over the years, for example: Lay Leadership, The Black Empowerment Controversy in the UUA, The Merger of Unitarian Universalism, Professional Ministry, and the Quality of Religious Life.

At its January meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, the Commission selected as its next topic the issue of the theological fragmentation of the Unitarian Universalist movement in North America. This decision was based on review of several suggested topics, information provided by many UUA staff and departments, and material collected at open hearings. The Commission will spend the next several years in detailed and thoughtful study of the question, "Where is the unity in our diversity?" The next Commission report is expected to be presented to the 2005 General Assembly.

We’d like to encourage you to become familiar with the goals, organization, and resources of the UUA. The COA is just one example. You can explore the website at [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org) to find out more. We strongly recommend the UUA bookstore, [www.uua.org/bookstore](http://www.uua.org/bookstore), which publishes books from Beacon Press (another department of the UUA, [www.beacon.org](http://www.beacon.org)) and other great publishers, covering a wide range of spiritual, social, and philosophical topics. And if you’re a member of the church, you should be receiving the monthly UUA publication, UU World.

Another important source for these sessions was Salted With Fire: UU Strategies for Sharing Faith and Growing Congregations, edited by Scott W. Alexander. It contains many of the passages that we quote in

the session content. This book is also available from the UUA bookstore. The book by Maria Harris, Fashion Me a People, is available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) (or you can order it from your local independent bookseller).

### **Session Attendance and Preparation—It's Really Important**

Please do whatever you can to encourage your members to attend both sessions G34 and G35, and to read the preparation sheets. They contain interesting quotes and unique exercises that will really get folks thinking about the meaning of the church in their lives. Please distribute the preparation sheet at the end of the prior session and make sure absent members receive a copy. Have extra copies available at the gathering for people who have forgotten to bring their copies.

### **Preliminaries**

Prior to beginning the session, take a few minutes to go over the announcements of church events given at the last leader meeting or from a recent church bulletin. Also, remind members of the next meeting date. Get volunteers to light the chalice and lead the Responsive Reading (regular type) at the beginning. Point out the list of UUA resources on the back of the Order of Worship.

### **Discussion**

The discussion period is meant to allow group members to go deeper, share things they may have forgotten to share, and exchange ideas. It is important that people not comment on others' sharing except in a very supportive way.

### **Timekeeping**

Use this timetable as an aid to keep the gathering on track.

preliminaries	2 minutes
opening	5 minutes
check-in	15 minutes
reading round-the-circle	5 minutes
silence	5 minutes
deep listening	60 minutes
discussion	15 minutes
singing	3 minute
closing	1 minute
<u>total</u>	<u>approx. 110 minutes</u>

### **Preparation for the Next Session**

Make sure everyone gets a copy of the preparation sheet for the next session.