

The following is excerpted from a handout for the Curriculum Planning Renaissance Module, entitled

Religious Education and Small Group Ministry: One Congregation's Plan

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Small Group Ministry Model for Religious Education

All Souls Sunday Session for Children and Family

Children's Worship for All Souls Sunday October 28, 2001

Altar : leaves, chrysanthemums and orange tablecloth, bowl of candles, chalice, bowl of mustard seed

Prelude: Children's Handbells (Tune: Jacob's Ladder)

Chalice Lighting : Life is a gift for which we are grateful. We gather in community to celebrate the glories and the mysteries of this great gift.

Reading (in three voices)

From *Many Winters* by Nancy Woods

You shall ask:

A: What good are dead leaves? And I will tell you

B: They nourish the sore earth. You shall ask

A: What reason is therefore winter? And I will tell you

B: To bring about new leaves. You shall ask

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A: Why are the leaves so green? And I will tell you B:

Because they are rich with life. You shall ask A: Why

must summer end? And I will tell you B: So that the

leaves can die.

This time of the year, when the days grow darker and colder, is a time when we are all very aware of death. The leaves have died and fallen—we wear Halloween costumes of ghosts and other spirits; we hang skeletons on our doors. These things are part of Halloween, to be sure, but they are also part of a much older and very important holiday. Although it has other names, the Universalists called it All Souls Day—it is a day when we remember those we love who have died. It seems especially important right now to remember those friends and family members, both humans and animals, who have died this year.

Why do we take the time to remember? And why we do it here in church, gathered together in our worship service?

I'd like to answer that by telling a story. Like the other stories I have been telling this month, this is a story from the Buddhist tradition.

Story: *The Mustard Seed Medicine*

This is why we come together to mark All Souls Day. We remember that each of us has times of sadness, and each of us has times when we grieve the death of someone close to us. It is in coming together, in sharing our sadness, in knowing that others understand our feelings and miss their loved ones as well, that we are comforted.

Today we name the people that you would like to remember. I'll read the list out loud, lighting a candle for each of them. At the end of the list, if you have people to add, you may mention them as well.

Candles of Remembrance

Meditation

Sit straight up in your chair or sit cross-legged on the floor so that you can breathe well. Close your eyes. Take a couple of long, slow, deep breaths.

Now, take a cleansing breath... as you breathe out, imagine that you are breathing out all of the things that disappointed or discouraged you last week.

Now, slowly breathe in, imagining that you are breathing in hope. Now take another cleansing breath and breathe out sadness and pain.... Then imagine that you are breathing in love and healing.

Now breathe out stress.

And breathe in peace and calm.

Sit quietly with your eyes closed for a few more minutes. When you are ready, open your eyes.

Song: *A Little More Oil in My Lamp* (taught by Rev. Ruth Gibson)

A little more oil in my lamp to keep it burning. A little more oil in my lamp, I pray.

A little more oil in my lamp to keep it burning. Keep it burning through the night and the day.

A little more love in my heart to keep me growing. A little more love in my heart I pray.

A little more love in my heart to keep me growing. Keep me growing through the night and the day.

Birth to death and death to birth (3 times) Brothers, sisters

all. Benediction

Small group questions for reflection:

All groups should begin with some kind of check-in. One possible check-in is to ask about Halloween plans. Those in grades 6-8 might want to tell about the Haunted House.

Reflection Questions

Grades One and Two

Divide group in half and ask children if they have ever had someone they love (or a pet) die. Ask each child to tell something about that person or pet.

What do you do when someone you know has had a death in their family? (Cards, words of comfort, bringing food, going to a service, being especially kind)

Please read the plans for grades 3-5 in case children ask you questions about death. If they don't ask theological questions, I advise sticking with a discussion of response to loss and grief (as above).

Grades Three-Five

Use the same questions as with grades one and two. This age group may have more experience with death and with the rituals following death than the younger ones (and they may not!). They will probably have questions about what happens when someone dies. For the theological questions (e.g., Is there a heaven?) you can state what you believe, but tell the children that other people have different beliefs. Ask them what they think. For the practical questions (e.g., What happens at a funeral?), you can simply tell them what your experiences have been and ask if any children have gone to a funeral. Encourage them to ask their parents the same questions they have asked you.

Grades Six-Eight

Ask the questions for grades one and two. This group will probably want to ask both practical and theological questions (see plans for grades 3-5). Do not hide what you believe, SHARE IT. DO, however, be sure to allow for other points of view among the youth. Some may be aware of their parents' points of view on these issues.

Practical responses to death and grief are extremely important for this age group. Ask them to talk about what you say and do when someone has had a death in the family (say, "I'm sorry," send a card, go to the service, bring food). Help them understand that they should respond to the loss, not ignore it. This is the compassionate thing to do.

Carrying Out Faith Into the World

Remind them that responding to death and grief is a part of carrying our faith into the world.

Wishes/Appreciation and Closure

Ask what they appreciated about the morning? What would have made the morning even better?

Restore the space by picking up and putting things away.

Small Group Ministry and Religious Education programming make an excellent match. Go to www.uua.org/families for more educational resources, contact Gail Forsyth-Vail for her publication [gail\(q\).northparish.org](mailto:gail(q).northparish.org), and check the UUA Bookstore for resources.