

## **LREDA Fall Conference Death "Panel" Outline**

**Presenters: Joy Berry, Rev. Natalie Fenimore, Rev. Judy Tomlinson, Gail Forsyth-Vail**

Saturday, October 22, 2016- 9:30 – 12:15 and 1:30 – 3:00

**TABLES:** There will be crescent shaped tables, 8 to a table. There will be 2 rectangular tables in the back for the loom project. Still working to figure out where to have people put their mementoes and photos. If there is no room, we may have to ask them to put those items on their individual tables. Unclear at this point.

### **Weaving project**

Weaving project set up at side of room on two oblong tables: Questions, such as "Who do you need to forgive?" "Who do you need to tell that you love them?" etc. Need fine point sharpies and satin ribbon. Write answers on ribbons, tie together and weave. The project will be available for people to work on throughout the day. [Joy]

### **Entry**

Invite people into affinity groups when they come into the room (200 people, 8 to a table, 25 tables). Map that has various categories for your cultural and social location (influences on your growing up years)

### **9:30 Worship**

Entry chant/music

Chalice lighting-Joy – chalice lighting words Kellie wrote

Mustard Seed story- Judy

Invitation to bring Photos and mementos forward- Gail

Music: Breaths, by Sweet Honey

Closing Prayer-Natalie

### **10:00 Intro [Gail]**

- Bathroom breaks
- Use journals if you don't want to talk but want to stay at the table- self-care.
- Chaplains
- Goals on the screen, let people read them (30 second summary) Understand ourselves, our own context- first aid metaphor. Helps us to go back with tools to take care of our own families and congregations.

## Bringing Death into the Room – Our stories

Say something like, “We all have ideas about what death looks like- hopes and fears. We all have some experience with death. We are going to explore and lift up some of the values, experiences, stories and practices around death that have influenced each of us. All have different ideas of what a good death looks like. [Gail]

Judy- brother’s death- military

Gail- taking care of Grammie

Natalie- deaths in her neighborhood growing up- interrupted young lives

Joy- caring for a neighbor with her daughter

Two or three minute story from each of the presenters about an experience with death.

Introduce weaving project. [Joy]

## 10:15 Bringing Death into the Room- everyone’s stories [Judy]

Invite people to sharing stories in 3’s- 5 min each. Slide show of memorial gardens, graves, urns, etc.

## 10:30 Activity [Joy]

Use blocks with words on them. Divide into two small groups at the table (if there are tables of ten; this is just to help with hearing). Ask individuals to work with blocks on the table- speak to each other using two of the words in front of them. First question, second question, third question- starting lighter and going deeper.

- Where do we come from?- How do these words your experience and cultural context about death?
- Where are you?- How are you with death right now? What hopes, anxieties, fears?
- Where are you going?- what words would you like to be able to use?

Sing: *Where Do We Come From?*

## 11:10 [Judy]

Short guided meditation, then time for silence, writing, drawing, etc.

11:25 Perspectives on death: Readings from the Common Bowl from Facing Death with Life [Gail, Judy will alternate reading]

Which quotes speak to you? [journaling]

11:35- 12:15 Understanding death as a UU. Invite table conversations about these questions [Natalie]  
Acknowledge that while religious educators are not primary, but should, in consultation with their teams, be part of what is happening around them-:

1. UU theology and death- how do we relate to those who have died? What do we think happens for ourselves at and after death? (Commonality in UUism that can hold your particularities. Caregiver needs to understand the spiritual needs of the person.)
2. Which cultural practices about death from your communities of origin do you find helpful and affirming? Which ones do you want to embrace in your own experiences of grief, mourning, and your own death?
3. Which cultural practices about death from your communities of origin are less helpful? Which ones do you want to leave behind or not embrace in your own experiences of grief, mourning, and your own death?
4. Which Unitarian Universalist practices about death do you find helpful and affirming? Which will be helpful at the time of your own death?
5. Is there something missing or unhelpful in your UU experience of death, grief, and mourning- something that you wish for at the time of your own death?

Close this out with Grace before lunch. [Joy]

### **Afternoon**

1:30 Brainstorm – [Gail] Maintain the thread with regard to the blocks. Ask them to consider if there were shared values that came up in the stories they have shared- direct attention back to the blocks and those words may be helpful to you (or you may come up with other words.

Thoughts carried forward from the morning about personal experiences- Popcorn style Ah-ha's, discoveries, and thoughts from the morning. [Melanie will write these down]

1:50 Conversations about preparing for death [6 minutes each]

1. Talk about the four questions one should consider before they die- reference to loom [Joy]  
Questions and discussion guide. 8 minutes. Joy will ask people to finish the loom.
2. Five wishes, conversation project, memorial societies.. Make death more visible and less scary. We make meaning by discerning and doing ideological work now. Processing those questions with our partner. These are the tools you can continue to work with. [Judy]
3. Narrative- ethical wills- there is meaning that lives beyond the loss- meaning making happens with the people in the room and the people who love them. These are the things about me that I want you to remember. How does your story continue? [Natalie]
4. Curriculum: Facing Death with Life. Death and Grief pages on UUA.org Web pages. 4 minutes. This workshop is a model for what you could do at your congregation or covenant group. Book list. [Gail]

2:15 Bringing the topic to congregational life [Judy]

- Have you realized that there is something you need? Resources?
- What personal work do you need to do? What work does your congregation need to do?
- What tools do you have?
- What insights from this morning point to what might be helpful practices in congregational life?
- How are we called to counter the culture that commodifies death- how many ways can we find in our churches to help hold space to honor death?

Conversation at table and journaling. Jot down if there is some aspect of these questions that you need to talk with someone else about.

2:45 Closing worship/ritual- What does it mean to live in awareness of the presence of death? We are called to try. Transition to work we have we have been doing together. Embodied in piece of art in front of us. [Joy]

Music from the bedside singing repertoire. [Kellie] Bring forward the weaving on the looms.

Natalie close with a blessing.