

**First Parish Church of Groton, Small Group Ministry**  
**Fall 2012 Session No. 7: Simplicity**

Facilitator \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Group Session Plan by Kathy Parliament Benson

**Supplies Needed:** Chalice, matches, drawing/writing paper, art supplies for drawing; Questions from the topic session written on sheet of paper or on small slips to hand out.

**1. Chalice Lighting/Opening Words (choose one or several):** 2 mins.

“We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in that. This allows us to do something, and do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way.”

– Bishop Ken Untener

Prophets of a Future Not Our Own (“The Romero Prayer”)

“Life is so difficult. We should all move a little slowly.”

– Thich Nhat Hahn

“In the face of ‘too much’” we gradually become dry, our hearts get tired, our energies become spare, and a mysterious longing for – we almost never have a name for it other than ‘a something’ – rises up in us more and more.”

– Clarissa Pinkola Estes

Women Who Run With the Wolves

**2. Check-in/Sharing:** up to 30 min.

Each person takes a few minutes to check-in. Invite people to check in by sharing: How is it with your spirit?

Alternative check-in: Share a Spiritual Moment from the past week.

**3. Topic: Simplicity:** 55 mins.

**3a. Introduction and Questions:** 5 mins.

“We know for ourselves the price we pay in stress-related symptoms when we get caught up in the disease of a-thousand-things-to-do. When we choose to slow down and simplify, it is usually with the intention of living a less stressful life. But there is more to it than that. The search for a slower pace of life comes not just from a need to experience less stress but also from a need to experience more depth and meaning. As a culture, we need to be asking not just “How do we slow down?” but “Why?”

– Abby Seixas

“Finding the Deep River Within”

“It has always seemed obvious to me that the faster I move, the more things I can do and the more fun and meaning my life will have. But it has gotten to the point where my days, crammed with all sorts of activities, feel like an Olympic endurance event: the everydayathon.”

– Jay Wallijasper, Utne Magazine

“Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life?...We are determined to be starved before we are hungry... I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life...

– Henry David Thoreau

Many of us would like to live more simply, to simplify our lives. Many of us struggle to slow down and find time for a more inward focus.

**3b. Questions** (See the list on the last page)

**3c. Silence for Reflection/Writing/Drawing:** 10 mins.

Invite the group into 5-10 minutes of silence during which time they are asked to reflect on the questions. Participants are invited to use this time for writing and/or drawing their responses, if they wish.

Optional: A five minute period to stand up, stretch, move about

**3d. Sharing:** 40 mins.

Coaches invite each person to share his or her response, taking a turn as each feels moved rather than in a clockwise fashion. Give each person an equal amount of time to share. If there is time after each person has shared and very brief comments or responses have been given, invite people into a more free-flowing discussion of the theme. Coaches may need to repeat the questions.

**4. Check out:** 10 mins.

Encourage people to check out with a final thought or reflection about what it was like to reflect on the subject of simplicity or other thoughts or reflections about the session and how having done so might shape or impact their life in any way in the week ahead.

**5. Closing Words and Extinguish the Chalice:** 2 mins.

“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.”

– Annie Dillard

“May the light around us guide our footsteps, and hold us fast to the best and most righteous vision that we seek. May the darkness around us nurture our dreams, and give us rest so that we may give us rest so that we may give ourselves to the work of the world. Let us seek to remember the wholeness of our lives, the weaving of light and shadow in this great and astonishing dance in which we move.”

– Kathleen McTigue

“Simplify, simplify, simplify,” said Emerson. Thoreau replied, “One simplify would do, Ralph.”

“Certain springs are tapped only when we are alone.”

– Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *Gift from the Sea*

There is no need to run outside  
for better seeing,  
nor to peer from a window. Rather abide

at the center of your being;  
For the more you leave it, the less you learn.  
Search your heart and see  
If he is wise who takes each turn:  
The way to do is to be.  
– Lao Tzu

## **6. Blessing**

May the efforts we have made here today  
To listen with caring and compassion  
Sustain us in the days ahead.  
May these efforts bring peace into our lives

May love surround us  
May joy gladden us  
May peace lie deep within  
May our lives, and the lives of all those we love  
Go well.

## **Questions for Reflection: Simplicity**

What feeds and comforts your spirit? How do you make room for this in your life? Do you do any regular practice or activity on a regular basis right now or in the past?

What are the demands in your life that keep you too busy?

What would you like to say “no” to in your life and what stops you?

What would you be willing to give up?

Why is it important for you to slow down? What are the benefits for you and your family? What are the fears?

Are there any advantages to a more complex and busy life? Is complexity a good or bad feature of your life?

Is there anything you have already done to simplify your life? What did that look like? How effective was it? What else are you hoping to do?

What one thing are you willing to try in the next week that will move your life closer to your goals for a simpler and more meaningful life?