Small Group Ministry

Group Session Plan

**Elders as Models**

**Opening Words \***

Listen to the voice of Audrey Shenandoah, Eagle Clan Mother of the Onondaga Nation:

“People choose a clan mother by watching how she has lived her life and cared for her family. She has to be someone who has a family and knows the responsibilities of being a mother, because that's evidence that she will take care of all the people as if they were her children... Clan mothers also have the duty of selecting a candidate for leadership chief in the clan... We have much to learn from the incredible knowledge of our ancestors which was gained long before reading and writing came about. Humans knew and felt relationship to all that lived and moved. Somehow that relationship must be regained.”

Here the elder, through the blessings of long life, remains with the tribe and takes on a guiding role. In our modern world we are often obsessed with youth and the latest technology. Our need for elder wisdom has been forgotten. In modern American culture we live in a time of widespread materialism, oppression, and violence. Elders might help guide us back to the wisdom of looking to the seventh generation, of inward contemplation and service to community. Yet elder wisdom does not follow automatically from long life. For age to produce a sage, a process of spiritual maturing is needed. But where in our current society are the programs and communities built to nurture the elder soul?

**Check in:** How is it with you today?

**Topic/Activity** In the words of spiritual leader Ram Dass, we were in "somebody training" in the first half of our life. We were building an effective identity—family/work/community identity. But having mastered being somebody, we become ready for the next lesson—how to transcend that limited self-definition. If I am not just this body or this Mom /Dad, or this job title or this community leader, who am I? What is the true self that transcends these roles? Aging raises questions and may provide the time and perspective to engage them with spiritual depth.

1. How doyou define/describe yourself today?
2. What is your true self that transcends the roles that you have had in life?
3. What do you want others to see in you?

**Checking-out**: How has this session been for you?

**Closing Words**  Imagine a society

Where elders are honored and revered.

Where wrinkles are a sign of dignity.

Where life experience counts.

Where elders are sought out for their wisdom, their ability to listen, their capacity to bring peace to the situation.

\*From “Reflections on Aging: Searching for Spiritual Models” Rev. Pat Hoertdoerfer on the website of the Northern New England District ([www.nned.uua.org](http://www.nned.uua.org)), 2011

Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Augusta, ME, Later Life Series, April 2011

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