



*Soul Matters*

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# Crossing Paths

Walking the Path of  
Catholicism

December 2018 - Mystery

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# Welcome

Welcome to the Crossing Paths packet for December and the exploration of the evangelical megachurch! In addition to exploring the world of the evangelical megachurch, this packet also engages our youth with December's theme of "What Does it Mean to Be a People of Mystery?"

As we begin our exploration, it might be easy to assume that evangelical megachurch is about as far from UUism as one could get. But maybe that's not quite right. For instance, take the huge crowds and high energy music of megachurch worship. Truth is, we create our own version of that every year at General Assembly, when over 4,000 UU's gather for mass worship and are led by music that has everyone on their feet with their hands in the air. If you ever have experienced these GA services, imagine the power of experiencing it each Sunday instead of just once a year, or once in a blue moon! Then imagine it with **our** message instead of the message of evangelical Christianity.

Could UUism ever include megachurches? Well, we almost do. We have large congregations of over 1000 members and one in Tulsa, Oklahoma with nearly 2000 members. Many other UU congregations of varying sizes have Saturday or Sunday night "rock music worship." It may not be everyone's cup of tea, but it's helpful to remember that style-wise we are not as far from our evangelical megachurch cousins than we think. Many of us in the UU family also hunger for worship that is high-energy, emotional and embodied.

None of this is to deny the real differences between UU's and evangelical Christians. As we will learn, one major difference is around the path to the Holy. Evangelicals are clear that Jesus is "the way" to God. They take the phrase "salvation through Christ alone" as central to their faith. Clearly, this contrasts with our UU view that there are many paths to genuine spirituality and wholeness. How to honor major differences like this without letting them blind us to the things we share with evangelicals will be the major work of this month.

And what better way to explore the depth of our similarity and difference than through the lens of mystery. December puts evangelical mystery on center stage. After all, mystery is what Advent, Christmas, the birth of Jesus and the incarnation are all about.

One process note about this month:

Since December is a holiday month, there are, at maximum, only three "usable" Sundays. So we have combined the Map and Tack Sundays into one, making this session guide include only Map/Tack Sunday, the Summit Sunday (the visit), and the Lake Sunday (reflection after the visit). As always, modify Crossing Paths for your own program. We want you to use this as a guide, not a cookbook!

Finally, all of us on the Soul Matters team want to wish you Happy Holidays! May mystery not just be a theme you explore, but also the gift you find this month. Thanks, as always, for letting us be your partners and walk these journeys with you in spirit!

***Katie, on behalf of the entire Soul Matters team***

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# Week 1

## Map/Tack Sunday

(Combined for December to make room for other special holiday services)

### *Purpose*

- Introduce youth to some of the basic beliefs and practices of the evangelical megachurch tradition, using our Crossing Paths' binoculars/lenses
- Explore the connection between our monthly theme of mystery and the evangelical megachurch.

### *Preparation & Leader Notes*

#### **Remembering Humility**

As always, remember that the aim of Map and Tack Sundays is to “get a glimpse” of each religion. There is no way to capture the fullness of these rich religions in a session or two. This is especially true of evangelical megachurch. The evangelical megachurch is more diverse than we UU’s often assume. The danger of exploring it for only a few hours is that of reinforcing these narrow perceptions. Our sessions do their best to present a more diverse view, but you will still need to help your youth remember our second practice of welcoming: “Always be curious.” And if one is able to be open and curious, they will surely be surprised and enriched by what they discover.

#### **Dinner and Drive Time Tips (Email to parents ahead of time):**

##### *Before the Session:*

- *Spend some time with your youth watching one or all of the short videos below. All of them offer a new and evolving picture of evangelicals. After watching one or all of them, have a discussion with your youth about your own assumptions about evangelicals and megachurches, as well as how those assumptions are changing or being challenged (maybe even as a result of these videos!) Encourage your youth to talk about their own assumptions and how they are planning to work during this month to be open expanding their views.*
  - *The 'New Breed' of Evangelicals:*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h\\_afCG\\_coAQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_afCG_coAQ)
  - *Rob Bell discusses "Love Wins" on Good Morning America:*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufENWTtGAz0>
  - *Oprah Goes Soul to Soul with Rob Bell:*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4vhjXQwrUc>
- *If you and your family are not familiar with the megachurch experience, you might want to familiarize yourself with it by watch these short clips together and comparing them to our own UU worship experience:*
  - *Bethel Church - worship & music:*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYB\\_mEIJtTI&list=RDg6\\_BLuhr0HQ&index=7](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYB_mEIJtTI&list=RDg6_BLuhr0HQ&index=7)
  - *Lakewood Church - worship & music:*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnbxNy47XXM>
  - *Joel Osteen - sermon clip:*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAb3ckpi798>
  - *Billy Graham - sermon clip:*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3c6qye-r2EA&index=7&list=PL79D3613A193294B6>

**After:**

- *In our centering worship we will listen to a rock version of “The Little Drummer Boy.” Focusing on the central line about “bringing one’s finest gifts,” we will ask your youth to think about their “finest gifts.” But just as the song lifts up the commonplace gift of playing a drum, we will ask the youth to talk about their seemingly “normal” but special gifts. For instance, their smile, artistic talent, positive attitude, ability to let things roll off their back, ability to listen. Consider asking your youth what they think their “common but finest” gifts are? Even better, consider telling them about what you think yours are.*

**For You:**

- *Spend some time enriching your own understanding of the evangelical megachurch tradition by watching these videos:*
  - *Evangelicals and Politics: Three Generations:*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X\\_SktYycndg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_SktYycndg)
  - *Heaven and Hell: Pastor Rob Bell Extended Interview:*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zBXuRIQ3qg>

**Pre-Session To Do List:**

- Send out the Dinner and Drive Time Tip. See above.
- Create this week’s graffiti board. Core question: What is the Megachurch?
- Make sure you have the technology needed to play the YouTube videos that are part of this session.
- Gather Christmas Cards and pens for use in the Worship.

## Session

# **Getting a View of the Terrain: The Evangelical Megachurch**

### **Entering - Graffiti Board Writing**

As youth enter the room invite them to engage the graffiti board. Encourage symbols, words, drawings. These can be representations of the evangelical megachurch, words or feelings and experiences that youth have in relationship to the evangelical megachurch. Make sure to use different color markers each week to you can track the evolution of the group's learning.

*This Week's Core Graffiti Board Question:*

***What is a Megachurch?***

### **Gathering & Centering - Worship (10 min)**

***TO DO AHEAD OF TIME:*** *To prepare for this worship, you need to locate a Christmas or Holiday Card and pens for each participant.*

#### ***Centering Sound***

Invite everyone to calm and center themselves. Use whatever ringing vessel you have chosen(chimes, bowl, bell). Ring the bell/bowl/chimes. Once the sound ends, pause for a moment of silence and then end by saying "Amen" or blessing words of your own.

#### ***Lighting the Chalice***

*We light this chalice in gratitude for the path we share, a path that guides us  
back to our deepest self,  
back to each other,  
And back to life's gifts and joy.*

#### ***Welcome & Lead-In to Centering***

Leader talking points:

- Welcome to Map Sunday and our exploration of this month's religion: evangelicalism, particularly as found in megachurches. This is one of the many forms that Christianity takes. We will be exploring other versions of Christianity as the year goes on.
- Map Sunday is when we "survey" the religion and use our "binoculars/lenses" to get a glimpse of it before we make our visit.
- We will also be considering the theme of mystery, which is especially fitting as mystery is at the core of the Christian/evangelical celebration of Advent, Christmas and the birth of Jesus.
- And in honor of the importance of Christmas for Christians and evangelicals, our centering music is a Christmas carol, done in a "megachurch way": The Little Drummer Boy.
- Have fun listening to this version, but as you do, keep in mind the central line about "bringing one's finest gifts."
- Think about the "finest gifts" you have to offer and one example of how you offered them to others recently. Like the commonplace gift of playing a drum, think especially about the your seemingly

- “normal” still special gifts: Your smile, your artistic talent, your positive attitude, your ability to let things roll of your back, your ability to listen.
- [HAND OUT BLANK CHRISTMAS OR HOLIDAY CARDS] To help as you reflect on your “finest” gifts, here is a blank holiday card. As you think of your finest gifts simply write them down or draw pictures to represent them. These are private, and you won’t be asked to share what’s in them unless you wish to. They are for you to keep and place in a visible place (in your room, on a shelf, by your bed, etc.) during the month to remind you to find ways to share your gifts with others during the holiday time.

## Music For Centering

**The Drummer Boy, from Elevation Church’s Christmas Eve service  
(Stop at minute 4:00)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5rEJNCwYpw>

*Leader Note: Don’t try to force a meditative feel or even a time of silence after the high-energy of the song. Instead, connect that high energy to how it feels inside when you share your gifts with others. You may also have to explicitly name how it can feel uncomfortable to talk about your special gifts. Sort of like bragging or making yourself vulnerable. Ask the group to support each other in this regard and ensure respect and safe space for each other.*

### **Thematic Check-in**

Invite the group to share - if they are comfortable - one of their common but powerful “finest gift” and how they have used it to offer a gift or help someone.

After the sharing, leader expresses gratitude for everyone’s sharing and for the gift of mystery that we can give to the world.

### **Closing**

“In the rest of our time together and in the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. and may we remember to lean into life’s joy. Blessed be. Amen”

### **Extinguish the Chalice**

Leader note: If you use a real flame, our advice is to extinguish it now to prevent accidental tipping over or pyro play with hot wax. If you use a tea light, you may wish to extinguish it at the end of the session during the closing words.

# Taking in the Terrain:

## A Glimpse of the Megachurch and Evangelical Tradition Through The Crossing Paths Binoculars/Lenses

### *Lens One* *Sizing Up the Terrain* & *Locating it on the Map (5 min.)*

You can keep this simple or get creative. The easiest and more time-efficient approach is to just share the basic facts. If you want to take it to the next level, consider getting a map for your room to capture and compare the size and location of the various religions. Use different colored push pins to represent the various religions and have each push pin represent some sizable increment, for instance 500,000 adherents.

#### When

Evangelicalism emerged as a distinct version of Christianity in the early 1700s as a reaction against the “coldness” of formal and rational Protestantism. It took the form of the megachurch movement in the mid-20th century and expanded rapidly throughout 1980s and 1990s, all across the world.

#### How Many and Where

13% percent of all Christians from around the world are evangelicals. About  $\frac{1}{3}$  are in the United states and the rest around the world with Brazil having the next largest population - 28% - of evangelicals. From 1960 to 2000, the global growth of evangelicals grew three times the world's population rate, and twice that of Islam.

There are 50 mega churches in the U.S. with a weekly average attendance of 10,000.

The largest megachurch in the United States is [Lakewood Church](#) in Houston, Texas with more than 40,000 members every weekend.

As a point of comparison, the two largest UU congregations are the Church of the Larger Fellowship, which has around 3000 members, and All Souls UU in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which has around 1900 members. Of the 1000 congregations in our UUA, only about 40 are what [we designate](#) as “large church.” To be a “large church” in the UUA you have to have 550 members and above.

## **Lens Two**

### ***The Problem and Solution in the World (25 min)***

**The Problem:** Sin & Hell

**The Solution:** To become “born again” - i.e. Accepting Jesus as your personal savior and the only way to connect with God

#### **Explain (background for leaders)**

Like most conservative Christians, evangelicals and evangelical megachurch members believe that the core human problem is that human-beings are sinful and thus “[condemned](#)” to hell. While there is [some debate](#) among evangelicals about exactly what hell is, the vast majority agree that it is a place or state of being where one is painfully cut off from God.

When it comes to the solution, evangelicals and evangelical megachurch members are distinguished by their strong emphasis on the [conversion experience](#), which in its simplest form is a matter of accepting that Jesus’s death on the cross is the only way heaven and thereby escaping the punishment of hell. This is referred to as being “born again.” As opposed to other protestant Christians who emphasize Jesus as a teacher and see the Christian life as living like Jesus did in this world, evangelicals emphasize Jesus as a sacrifice that enables human beings to escape hell and instead receive the gift of heaven and eternal connection with God.

It’s also important to understand that evangelicals and evangelical megachurch members believe that the reason Jesus’ death was able to “pay the debt” of human sin is that Jesus was really God in human form. Because he was God in human form, Jesus was not stained by sin. He was the only human without sin, and thus this purity allowed him to be a “worthy sacrifice.” This miracle of God becoming human is called the “[incarnation](#)” and it is the great mystery that is celebrated at Christmas time.

As we think about our church’s monthly theme -mystery - and how it relates to evangelicals, it is important to remember that the mystery of the incarnation is not just about telling the world that God came down in human form to save human beings from sin and hell.

For evangelicals, the incarnation is also about telling people that God came down from heaven in human form *to be with us*. Evangelicals will often talk about how the incarnation shows that God [knows human pain and understands us most deeply](#). God is not just an unknowable mystery that exists in another plane of existence; God also “walks among and beside us.”

## **Engage (to do with the group)**

This second meaning of the incarnation is captured in the well-known poem/story of “Footprints in the Sand.” Let’s listen to it: ( Use one of these options.)

- Read the Poem: <http://charitychristianfellowship.org/sites/default/files/mission-newsletter-archives/2007-10-footprints.pdf>
- Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noCLFTXkuR0>

As we think about the mystery of the incarnation and its message that God is mysteriously and wonderfully walking beside people during their struggles, it might seem to be one way that evangelicals are very different than Unitarian Universalists. But while most UUs don’t talk about God mysteriously and invisibly walking beside them, we often remind each other that we don’t walk through hard times alone. We UUs also point to “footprints in the sand.” It’s just that those footprints are not just God’s but other human beings. We can all think of times when we are convinced that we were completely alone and then wonderfully and even mysteriously people showed up to help and support us.

So as a way of honoring this and as a way of connecting to the evangelical message that “we’re never alone,” let’s make our own “UU Footprints in the Sand” mural...

### **UU Footprints in the Sand Mural**

Create footprint art with mural paper or taped together paper.

- Place paint trays at one end, along with some chairs for removing socks and shoes.
- Place trays or buckets of water, towels or paper towels and some chairs for washing off the paint at the other end of the mural.
- Use casserole dishes, trays, etc. large enough for a foot to lay in it.
- Pour enough tempera paint in it to just cover the soles of the foot.
- Invite the group members to take off their shoes and socks and place their foot into the paint then walk across the mural paper, leaving footprints.
- When they are done, invite them to wash the paint off of their feet.
- Replenish the paint trays at the beginning as needed.

When the mural is dry, invite the group to sign their names around the edges and hang in the room to remember to always look around for the support from friends when times get tough.

## **Lens Three** **Sound and Sight (15 min.)**

### **Explain (background for leaders)**

We usually prioritize an exploration of the symbol of each tradition. Because we've already covered the core symbol of Christianity - the Cross - we are focusing instead on the sounds and sights the evangelical megachurch experience. One might even argue that the megachurch sights and sounds are their central visual symbol.

The question this activity invites us to wrestle with is: Are we similar in ways we don't expect? We may not think of it this way, but we UU's offer a megachurch experience every year at General Assembly, our national meeting. The power of worship in a large group with high-energy music and supportive technology is very moving. This activity invites us to see that this desire for a more experiential and emotional worship experience is held by liberal religious folk as well as conservative. The activity is also a way of reminding the youth that numerous congregations -maybe even theirs- are *already* committed to offering this style of worship to those who resonate with it.

### **Engage (Group Activity)**

#### **Game**

#### **Name That Tune, err, Church**

Show the below pictures of people at worship and short clips of worship one by one, leaving time in between each viewing for the youth to guess whether it is from a UU worship service or evangelical megachurch service. This guessing can be done as individuals or in teams. Each person or group gets a point if they guess right. And they can earn extra points by naming "good" reasons for why they decided one way or another. To put it another way, the more "give away" characteristics you can name, the more points you get. For instance, the youth might playfully name "no one is clapping," "minister is using a sermon script," "organ music," and "rainbow colored robes" as the "giveaways" for a UU picture or video. Exploring these giveaways is what makes the activity interesting. It allows us to notice things about ourselves as UUs that we may not have noticed before.

Another note: It's likely that youth will be able to easily distinguish which images are UU and which are evangelical, but in a number of cases the pictures will look more similar than different. Be sure to lift this up to show that we are not as completely different as we may think.

Process Note: Cue up all the pictures and videos ahead of time. Open them all in different tabs on your computer to make transitions easier. Also be sure to open them to full screen before showing the group so as not to show the captions/titles and give away their origin. Finally, you will notice that two links are given for each picture. This is because some computers only open with one of the links not the other.

## Name That Church Pictures & Video Clips

### **Exhibit A:(UU)**

[P1120347resize.jpg](#)

<http://www.greaterphillyuu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/P1120347resize.jpg>

### **Exhibit B:(Evangelical)**

[Groeschel.jpg](#)

<http://religionnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Groeschel.jpg>

### **Exhibit C: (UU)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PobbLXzUkZU>

Start at minute 2:30

### **Exhibit D: (UU)**

[7433023242\\_04701d0ae5.jpg](#)

[http://growinguu.blogs.uua.org/files/2012/07/7433023242\\_04701d0ae5.jpg](http://growinguu.blogs.uua.org/files/2012/07/7433023242_04701d0ae5.jpg)

### **Exhibit E: (Evangelical)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNqo4Un2uZI&index=4&list=RDau3EGgISYMc>

Start at minute 5:15

### **Exhibit F: (UU)**

<https://www.facebook.com/firstu/videos/10152907871816845/>

Start 20 seconds in

### **Exhibit G: (Evangelical)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrH9NWPkxoE>

Start at minute 1:15 and play to minute 2:05

### **Exhibit H: (Evangelical)**

[Worship.jpg](#)

<https://thegospelside.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/worship.jpg>

### **Exhibit I:(UU)**

[June2011\\_rev\\_niwano\\_uua.jpg](#)

[https://rk-world.org/images/cms/image/june2011\\_rev\\_niwano\\_uua.jpg](https://rk-world.org/images/cms/image/june2011_rev_niwano_uua.jpg)

### **Exhibit J: (Evangelical)**

[IMG\\_9231.jpg](#)

[http://megasystemsinc.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IMG\\_9231.jpg](http://megasystemsinc.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IMG_9231.jpg)

### **Exhibit K: (UU)**

<https://www.uua.org/ga/past/2016/worship/sunday>

Play from minute 4:00-4:15

### **Exhibit L: (UU)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1gOTg45DOK>

Start at minute 11:20

### **Graffiti Board - Filling in the Gaps (3 min.)**

Invite the youth to add a picture or word to the graffiti board, picking one thing that engaged them most about today's session. What did they learn that they think is most important to add.

Remember to use markers that are a different color than was used to fill or the board at the start of the session, so you can continue to track learning over the sessions.

### **Looking Ahead - What to do ahead of time or expect (2 min.)**

Thank the youth for their participation this week. Note one thing that you particularly appreciated or enjoyed about the session you just did with them.

Remind the youth what is happening next week and make sure they know what they have to do ahead of time. Note one thing that you are particularly looking forward to.

### **Closing Words (1 min)**

"In the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to lean into life's joy. Blessed be. Amen"

# Week 2

## Summit Day

(The Visit)

### Purpose

- Get a direct experience of the evangelical megachurch experience with a site visit
- Engage and use our Eight Practices of Welcoming

### Preparation & Leader Notes

#### Dinner and Drive Time Tips (Email to parents prior to the meeting):

##### **Before:**

- Ask your youth which of the 8 practices of welcoming they are thinking about this week. Which matters to them most? Which is the one they want to work on or which do they think will be most important on their visit?
- Remind your youth to bring an offering. We recommend an amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_.
- Remind your youth about dress requirements. **[Leader note: tailor this bullet to the visit]**

##### **After:**

- Ask your youth to share their favorite part of the visit.
- Reflect with them on your own experiences with and understanding of the megachurch. Be sure to model a gracious spirit and talk about what you appreciate about megachurch worship and evangelicalism .

##### **For You:**

- Check out the story of Reverend Carlton Pearson, a nationally-known evangelical pastor in Tulsa, Oklahoma, who made a decision to be open about his theological doubts even when he knew it would come at a great cost. He rejected the common understanding of hell and embraced Universalism. This American Life did a radio show about him: <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/304/heretics/>.
- There's also a great UU connection: Carlton Pearson and the remaining members of his church joined with our UU congregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma! Here's a news article about it: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14337492/>
- There's also a Netflix movie about his story: <https://www.netflix.com/title/80152625>
- Here's a review: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/ira-glass-netflix-film-come-sunday-tells-story-of-evangelical-bishop-who-stopped-believing-in-hell-223159/>

## **Pre-Visit To Do List:**

- Arrange for and prepare the drivers. Make sure the drivers:
  - Have the address of the destination and a phone number to call if there are problems.
  - Have a list of who is in their car and their emergency contact numbers.
  - Are familiar with and comply with congregational safety guidelines, such as a license and proof of insurance on record.
- Send the Interview Questions to the faith leader, optional.
- Make sure to collect signed permission slips from group members, with all relevant contact information and emergency numbers. Make a copy to leave at the church, and a copy to bring on the trip.
- Let parents know the approximate time of return and post it on the door of your meeting room.
- Prepare to post a “We Will Return Soon” note in case someone comes late, such as “Sorry we missed you. The Crossing Paths group is visiting \_\_\_\_\_. We will return at \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Bring offering money for each group member or remind them to bring some
- Consider purchasing or bringing a gift for your host. Perhaps an interfaith [poster](#) or [calendar](#).
- Make sure you have collected and clarified all the rules & expectations for your visit. You will share this information before you leave your church on Summit Sunday. Rules and expectations include:
  - the name of the faith community you are visiting. (e.g., First Congregational Church of...)
  - the religion’s name for their house of worship. (e.g., temple, church, mosque...)
  - what the religious leader is called and how they should be addressed (e.g., “They are call a minister and they should be addressed as Rev. Jones or Pastor Jones.”)
  - other behaviors that should be observed (e.g., expect dress, silence in certain spaces, when one can and when one shouldn’t participate in a ritual, etc.)
  - When and if it is appropriate to take pictures with phones. (Remember that we want to have some select moments when photos are gathered so they can be used in the end of year scrapbook or video)

## Session - Visit

### Before You Go

Before you leave, gather as a group at your home church and do the following:

#### Remembering to be a Good Guest:

Leader reviews basic information and guidelines about how to be respectful during the visit:

1. Share the name of the faith community you are visiting. (e.g., First Congregational Church of...)
2. Share the religion's name for their house of worship. (e.g., temple, church, mosque...)
3. Tell them what the religious is called and how they should be addressed (e.g., "They are call a minister and they should be addressed as Rev. Jones or Pastor Jones.")
4. Review other behaviors that should be observed (e.g., silence in certain spaces, when one can and when one shouldn't participate in a ritual, etc.)
5. Make sure everyone's dress is appropriate and honors the expectations of the tradition you are visiting. If someone has forgotten, address the situation according to the understandings you've made ahead of time.
6. Share when and if it is appropriate to take pictures with phones. (Remember that we want to have some strategic moments when photos are gathered so they can be used in the end of year scrapbook or video)
7. Share expectations about texting and use of smartphones.
8. Remind them that they are guests and will be representing Unitarian Universalism to your hosts
9. Go over the travel plans and rules:
  - Assign participants to a car and make sure they know to return in the same car.
  - Be respectful of their drivers and cars.
  - Give emergency contact numbers to drivers.

**Packing Up Our Eight Practices:** Gather in your church foyer or parking lot before you go. Create a circle and share a blessing based on the Eight Practices of Welcoming.

We recommend that you print out this blessing, so the youth have the Eight Practices physically available. Here's one version of a blessing you could do. Do it as a group by each person taking turns reading one line:

*Leader: Let us take a breath and pause before we go.*

*[PAUSE IN SILENCE]*

*With our feet firmly grounded here at our church home, we are grateful.*

*Here we find community and comfort.*

*Here we also encounter the call to go out, explore and become more..*

*On our journey today, let us take our practices and values with us  
so we can notice and receive all the gifts offered to us.*

*May we remember to...*

*Be fully present*

*Be curious*

*Be open to being changed*

*Be comfortable with discomfort*

*Be an appreciative listener*

*Be light-hearted*

*Be gentle when mistakes are made*

*And, be ourselves*

*With all these commitments tucked tightly in our hearts and heads, Amen, Let's go!*

## **The Visit (and a reminder about collecting pictures)**

Have a great time!

Don't forget to about collecting pictures for our future scrapbook/memory wall/video project. At the very least get a picture of the youth in front of the house of worship.

*Have the youth text or email you 1-2 of their favorite pictures that they took. Save for the spring scrapbook/memory wall/video project.*

## **After the Visit (just before everyone heads home)**

### **Looking Ahead - What to do ahead of next week's meeting and what to expect (1 min.)**

Thank the youth for their participation. Praise something about how the youth handled themselves. Note one thing that you particularly appreciated or enjoyed about the visit.

Remind the youth that next week is Lake Sunday. Lift up anything they need to do or think about ahead of time.

### **Closing Words**

"In the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to lean into life's joy. Blessed be. Amen"

# **Week 3**

## **Lake Sunday**

*(Reflecting on Our Visit)*

### **Purpose**

- Reflect on the visit.
- Review our use of the Eight Practices of Welcoming

### **Preparation & Leader Notes**

#### **Dinner and Drive Time Tips (Email to parents prior to the meeting):**

##### **Before:**

- *Talk with your youth about what they plan to write on the Thank You Card that will be sent to the faith community they visited last week. This will help them prepare, give them a chance to reflect more on the visit and better enable them to write something meaningful.*

##### **After:**

- *Ask your youth to share which of the 8 Practices of Welcoming were hardest them personally.*
- *Ask them to share something about the graffiti board. They have been adding to it each week. Ask them how the board has changed? What's interesting about how it has changed and grown? How does it show that the group's understanding of the evangelical megachurch has evolved?*

##### **For You:**

- *Talk with your spouse/partner or a friend about how your own view of the Megachurch has evolved over the month as a result of your conversations with your youth.*
- *Consider reaching out to a colleague or co-worker who you know attends an evangelical megachurch. Let them know about your youth's study and visit. Engage them in a conversation at any level that feels comfortable for you. Maybe you share what you've appreciated as you've been learning more about their faith. Maybe ask them what stereotypes about evangelicals concern them and what they wish others understood.*

#### **Pre-Session To Do List:**

- Find small pieces of paper and pens or markers for worship, one for each group member to write a note to the faith leader.
- (optional add on if you have more than an hour) Invite a guest with a Megachurch background or experience, perhaps identified in the Parent Orientation, or from a request to the congregation at large. Share Handout #1 with them and let them know the youth will be asking them the questions listed, optional.
- (optional add on if you have more than an hour) Make plans to attend the adult service or part of the service as a way of exploring the monthly theme of mystery.

## Session

### Entering - Graffiti Board Writing

Using the same graffiti board from past weeks, invite those entering to add words, pictures or impressions that represent what stuck out for them about last week's visit. Make sure to use different color markers each week to you can track the evolution of the group's learning.

### Gathering & Centering - Worship (10 min)

**TO DO AHEAD OF TIME:** *To prepare for this worship, you need to find a thank-you card and enough small pieces of paper and pens for each group member to write a note. These notes will be included in the thank-you card.*

#### Centering Sound

Invite everyone to calm and center themselves. Use whatever ringing vessel you have chosen (chimes, bowl, bell). Ring the bell/bowl/chimes. Once the sound ends, pause for a moment of silence and then end by saying "Amen" or blessing words of your own.

#### Lighting the Chalice

*"We light this chalice in gratitude for the path we share, a path that guides us back to our deepest self, back to each other, And back to life's gifts and joy."*

#### Welcome

Suggested welcome script:

- Welcome everyone to Lake Sunday!
- Lake Sunday is about coming back from our journey - back down the mountain - and reflecting on our trip.
- I'm so excited for us to talk about our visit. As a way of getting ready for our discussion, our centering song this morning is a song about gratitude.
- Today is about sharing the things from our visit that we are grateful for and how the visit made us grateful for our own faith.
- By focusing on gratitude, it's a perfect song to play as we pass around the thank-you card for you to sign and a small sheet of paper to each person to write a few words to the faith leader if you wish.

Share this video to put us in a grateful mood.

#### Video For Centering

Dad Reminds Us of Holiday Gratitude:

- <https://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=19C1CJNU>
- <https://www.facebook.com/ForestHillWaxhaw/videos/684065918422297/>

#### Closing Words

*"In the rest of our time together and in the days ahead, **May the ropes be with us.** May we stay close to our inner and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. May we remember to lean into life's joy. - Blessed be. Amen"*

#### Extinguish the Chalice

Leader note: If you have an open flame, we suggest extinguishing it at this point to prevent accidents and pyro-play. Otherwise, consider extinguishing it during the Closing at the end of the session.

## Reflecting on the Visit (30 min)

Questions to guide the discussion:

### *Initial Reactions*

- 1. What surprised you?** What was completely new? What didn't you expect?
- 2. What was the most interesting part?** What was "cool"? When were you having the most fun?
- 3. What didn't you fully understand?** What confused you? What do you want to learn more about (Leader note: Answer the questions/confusions if you can. Or see if the group can help. If time, look up the answer on a computer/phone. If no time for that, encourage the youth to look it up with their parents or promise to look it up for them)

### *Personal Application*

- 4. How did it make you think about your own life differently?** How do you wish your outlook on life was more like the people in the Megachurch you met?
- 5. Additional Discussion:** Lead the group in discussion about additional personal take-aways. Invite youth to think about how the visit and all the learning of the past weeks gave them a challenge for their own life. Give them some example questions to help them reflect, such as:
  - Did the power of being in a large group make you wish you had more people in our congregation? Or did it make you appreciate the intimacy of a smaller group?
  - Did the message/sermon you heard reinforce or challenge your assumptions about evangelicals?
  - Do you envy evangelicals feeling of being so close to and accepted by something greater than oneself?
  - Did their commitment to sharing their faith with others make you wonder about sharing your UU faith just a bit more boldly?
  - Consider sharing your own personal take-aways.

## Engaging the Graffiti Board - Stepping back & seeing how far we've come! (10 min)

- Gather around the graffiti board or take it down and bring it into the circle.
- Pause to see if there are any last things to add.
- Invite reactions and discussion:
  - 1. What strikes you as you look at the different colors?** Were there some weeks where we seemed to learn more than others? Are there more words than pictures? What does that mean?
  - 2. Is there anything on the board that needs corrected?** Any "understanding" that was incomplete or misunderstood?
  - 3. What 2-3 things seem to best describe the essence of the evangelical megachurch for you?** If you had to explain the Evangelical Megachurch to someone else, which 2-3 items on the board would you talk about?
- Take some selfies! Individual and as a group. Remember to remind the youth that we will be using these pictures in the spring to create a scrapbook, memory wall or video to document our journey this year.

## **Eight Practices Review (10 min)**

Remind the youth that Crossing Paths is not just about visiting and learning about other religions. It's also about learning skills and practices to better engage new people and new ideas throughout our entire life. So explain that you are reviewing how well the group used the 8 Practices not just to "grade ourselves" but also to push ourselves to develop them as "life practices." The 8 Practices are included below, in Handout #2.

There are a number of ways to review the practices:

1. **As a group:** Have the group evaluate itself as a whole by going through the list one by one and asking the group to share when they did each practice well and when they could have done it a bit better.
2. **As individuals:** Ask each person to pick one practice they feel they did well and one practice they wish they had done better and want to work on. Take turns having each youth share their answers.

## **Games**

from Birmingham Live, UK (<https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/whats-on/family-kids-news/christmas-party-games-christmas-day-10616606>)

### **Mystery Stocking Game**

"Fill a large Christmas stocking with items from around the house and ask the group members to guess what's inside without looking. Add in items like a carrot, a cracker, a sponge and a brush. Have several stockings ready if you have a large gathering near Christmas.

### **Mystery Christmas Song**

Get a Christmas CD, or find a playlist on YouTube, and play just a few notes of each song, asking your guests to guess the name of the tune and the artist too.

### **The Night Before Christmas Game - mystery listening**

Give each guest the name of something Christmassy from The Night Before Christmas (e.g., reindeer, sleigh, Christmas tree) then read out the poem. When each person hears their word, he or she stands up, turns around and sits down again. And, when you read out the words 'Santa Claus', everyone swaps places. Chaos. But fun.

### **Mystery Christmas Tray Game**

Put festive items, such as a cracker, mince pie, bauble, tinsel, etc., onto a tray and allow your guests one minute to memorize the items they've seen. Then remove the tray and ask them to write down as many as they can remember."

## **Looking Ahead - What to do ahead of time or expect**

Thank the youth for their participation this week. Note one thing that you particularly appreciated or enjoyed about the session you just did with them.

Remind the youth about the schedule for the holidays and when they will return to Crossing Paths. Wish them Happy Holidays! May mystery not just be a theme we explore, but also the gift we find this month.

## **Closing Words**

"In the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to lean into life's joy. Blessed be. Amen"

*Extinguish the chalice if you haven't done so earlier. Invite any participants to sign the thank-you card if they haven't done so.*

## ***Add Ons for Groups with More Time***

Leader Note: Any of these options might be used as part of the 4th Sunday (Valley Sunday.)

### **Option #1 - Interview**

If you have time, consider inviting a congregant with a background in the Megachurch to visit and talk with the youth. You can do this after or before you reflect on your visit - both have advantages and disadvantages. Use Handout #3 "Interview Questions."

### **Option #2 - Attend the Adult Service on mystery**

"Visiting" your own worship service can enrich the experience tremendously. If you usually meet during the service, consider changing and expanding your schedule for Lake Sunday, attending the service first then staying after to do the Lake Sunday session. You can go even deeper with this by asking your minister or ministers to come talk with the youth after the service about what they appreciate about the Megachurch and how they see UUs and megachurch congregants being similar and different when it comes to belief and their understanding of what it means to be a people of mystery.

***Handout #1:***  
***The Eight Practices of Welcoming Difference***

1. Be fully present
2. Be curious
3. Be open to being changed
4. Be comfortable with discomfort
5. Be an appreciative listener
6. Be light-hearted
7. Be gentle (allow and heal mistakes)
8. Be yourself

## **Handout #2**

### **Interview Questions**

#### ***Seeing the Megachurch Through the Lens of Experience!***

*If your interviewee is a member of a megachurch, we suggest that you use the name of the church, i.e. Lakewood Church, in asking these questions, in order to be respectful of their experience.*

1. What one or two things distinguish you from other Christian traditions?
2. Did you always worship in a megachurch? What other sizes of church or styles of worship have you participated in? What do you appreciate most about your megachurch style of worship? What do you miss about your past forms of religious community and worship?
3. What are the major misconceptions out there about evangelicals? What do you wish others better understood?
4. What is your favorite service, ritual or holiday of the church year? Do you think evangelicals celebrate it in a unique way?
5. What is your favorite Biblical story and why?
6. Do you miss traditional church music, like hymn singing?
7. What's your conversion story? When did you accept Jesus in your life? Is there any person in particular that played a major role in it?
8. What is your regular personal spiritual practice? How has your congregation altered or deepened your personal spiritual practice?
9. Our church's monthly spiritual theme is "How are we a people of mystery." What does "Being a person of mystery" mean to you? How has your faith influenced that?

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To keep you inspired as a group leader, check out our  
Soul Matters Facebook inspiration page:

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