



SMALL GROUP MINISTRIES

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## Play and Playfulness

We all know that play is fun, even joyful. It refreshes and energizes us. For centuries, thoughtful observers have recognized play as a central element of life, throughout life... In play our burdens feel lighter and we are opened to new possibilities. But play goes even deeper – it shapes our brains to make us smarter and more able to adapt in novel situations; and this happens for all players, old and young. – *The National Institute for Play (www.nifplay.org)*

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### Openings and Chalice Lighting (2 min.)

In this small flame dwell:

The beacon light of lanterns guiding travelers home;

The warmth of hearth fires tended through the generations;

The transforming energy of furnaces and the power and life of our sun.

May these blessings—

Warmth and light and life-giving energy—

Be kindled in each of us.

- *Jean L. Wahlstrom*

### Quiet Reflection (3 min.)

Listening is a hug you give with your mind.

– *Barbara Nixon*

### Sharing/Check-In (35 min.)

*Take two or three minutes to share how you are spiritually, psychologically, emotionally, and physically. We want to know how you are in this moment.*

### Quiet Reflection (1 min.)

*Let's take a moment to be together in silence, holding in our hearts the sorrows and joys that we've spoken here, as well as those that remain unspoken. Let's offer our love, our celebration, and our healing to each other as we gather here tonight.*

### Play Activity (10 min.)

*Together with one or two other people, play a game—choose one from the handout or play any other game that you remember from childhood.*

### Topic Readings (3 min.)

It is a happy talent to know how to play. - *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation. - *Plato*

Man is most nearly himself when he achieves the seriousness of a child at play. - *Heraclitus*

I didn't have anyone to play with so I made up my own world. – *Maya Lin*

Playing around is a good and holy thing. Don't ever let anyone tell you otherwise. It enables us to express ourselves creatively, to use our intuition and imagination, to savor pleasure and the lightness of being, and to make our humble contribution to the unfinished masterpiece of the world. - *Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, Spiritual Literacy*

Play keeps us vital and alive. It gives us an enthusiasm for life that is irreplaceable. Without it, life just doesn't taste good. - *Lucia Capocchione*

### Break/ Contemplation (10 min.)

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**Sharing/Deep  
Listening**  
(30 min.)

*Speak about this topic in any way that is comfortable to you. If you choose to use the questions, focus on just one or two, as this will allow you to explore the topic in more depth.*

- Tell us about one of your favorite memories of playing as a child. How did you play—alone, with friends, on a team? What did you play—make-believe, games, sports? Do you think how and what you played represent who you were as a child? Who you are today?
- Do you still play as an adult? If you don't, what keeps you from playing? If you do, how do you play now? Has it changed from how you played as a child?
- The readings suggest that there are many reasons to value play—keeping us young, using our intuition and imagination, helping us adapt and thrive. What benefits, if any, has play brought to your life? Do you feel the readings ascribe too much value to play?
- To paraphrase Heraclitus, do we become more fully ourselves through play? Do you feel that you are closer to your “true self” when you play? What do you feel that you have learned about another person when you've played together? What haven't you been able to learn about someone this way?
- Has playing ever become a spiritual experience for you? How? Can or should spirituality or religion be playful?

**Discussion**  
(15 min.)

*This is a time to supportively respond to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.*

**Checkout/  
Likes & Wishes**  
(10 min.)

*What did you like about this gathering?  
What would you like to see change at future gatherings?*

**Announcements** (2 min.)

**Closing Reading/  
Extinguish Chalice**  
(2 min.)

Did you ever  
fly a kite  
in bed?

Did you ever walk  
with ten cats  
on your head?

Did you ever milk  
this kind of cow?

Well, we can do it.  
We know how.

If you never did,  
you should.  
These things are fun  
and fun is good.

- Dr. Seuss,  
*One Fish, Two Fish,  
Red Fish, Blue Fish*

**Closing Reading**  
(2 min.)

Let us sing the magic of imagination by which we know one another and learn the lives of eras gone by.

Let us sing the magic of creation by which we build the world of our soul and teach its wisdom to others, young and old.

Let us sing the magic of our lives together, holding and shaping by the movement of breath from heart to lung all new life that is to come.

Go now with singing. Go now with magic in your fingertips. Touch this world with life.

- Susan L. Van Dreser (1997 UUMA Worship Materials, from UUA Worship Web)