

General Thoughts and Feelings regarding Joys and Sorrows

1. It is too "small" (or "dry") a ritual to honor some of the sorrows, losses that are shared. No way to know if, or how, minister or Care Committee follows up, or whether member wants any follow up.
2. I think that joys and concerns usually meets our needs well. Once in a while some members bring in some rather extraneous examples, and once in a while someone speaks at length. But <Minister> is very good about helping wandering thoughts get focused and helping us keep our joys and concerns as expressions of the needs of members. He helps guide us well into a meditation of prayerful concentration on what has been said and what is unspoken in our hearts.
3. There are certain people who stand up and talk about minor events in their lives every Sunday. I find it embarrassing and think it may detract from potential new membership. Personally, I'd like to have the minister inform us of serious concerns instead.
4. I think to some extent it is the weak glue that helps hold us together but I feel there could be better, more powerful methods. I'm hopeful that a stronger Pastoral Care program to be implemented this summer will allow us to consider in the future whether we could eliminate j&s from our Sunday service.
5. The most important thing is follow-up by the minister and the congregational care committee but that does not seem to be happening.
6. When this was an issue with a few members of our congregation a few years ago, the candles were taken out of the service for a month. There were a few other changes but I think that the candles part being taken away caused more damage to our congregation than any other single event. I was among many who were happy to see them come back. I understood why they were removed and participated in the process to address those concerns. I know that there are many out there who feel that Candles of Sharing can be a bad thing but if done properly they can be one of the elements that bring a congregation together. The trick is to set very clear boundaries!
7. Some people left anyway when we decided to keep them. Others haven't grasped that J&C isn't a check-in. Some have shared less often once we understood each other. There is still frustration in some people, but at a much lower level. Others are very pleased with J&C. We have an informal service anyway and this uncontrollable informality is not inconsistent with other things, to the chagrin of a minority. * * * * * I think it was a shame that the results of this survey were skewed by the two earlier emails that - with its opening line - selectively targeted those who are unhappy with J&C to respond. Thank you for removing that line on this last request.
8. Coming from a more liturgical background, I think of it as a uniquely UU form of intercessory prayer, one that is created by the community rather than the worship leader.
9. I personally dislike the spoken J&S. I find it very uncomfortable to hear someone tell about a parent who has died either before or after someone mentions getting a new puppy. It adds nothing to the worship experience for me personally. However, I love the candle lighting.
10. It seems to be a respected part of what we do each week. When we run short on time, it is never cut.
11. I think some of our members feel a deep need to share their joys & sorrows. I am not one of them, but I support the process because it is so meaningful to them.
12. Congregation is generally very respectful as to length and content. Otherwise I might have made greater effort to change the way we do this sooner.
13. For people who love silence and who seem to be more spiritually open, J&C is a particularly centering and deep experience. I have felt the presence of the holy more consistently during J&C than at other times, except for music.
14. We rotate Pastoral Friends team members to record the J & S, respond appropriately to those concerned with cards, visits, food, etc. The team member then emails the minister, administrative assistant & other team members to be sure the rest of the congregation has an opportunity to act. We have a "Thoughts and Prayers" section in our weekly publication, and a "Milestone" section for the major life happenings in our monthly newsletter. Every year or two we write a little something about what we do, and always give names and contact phone numbers for those who are unable to light a candle.

15. For our congregation joys and concerns works. There have been times when there were problems but thoughtful responses have saved the tradition.
16. I think it is an important part of the service because we learn so much about each other but 1) some people use it for trivia - and, if everyone shared the kinds of things a few people choose to share, then joys and concerns would take hours and 2) there are many people who never say anything but certainly do have joys and concerns. So, it is a good platform for many but not a good platform for all.
17. My thought is that for many this might be their favorite Sunday morning ritual. We have succeeded in getting political announcements out of joys and sorrows since I have been here, though at first and maybe still there are some who resent that.
18. it is a meaningful method to share our "news" and is especially important for those members who have no support group other than the congregation. Other members take it upon themselves to follow-up (cards, calls, visits, offers of assistance, etc.) as well as it is a means for our "Caring Network" to be informed of a need.
19. I believe the effectiveness of joys & concerns depends mainly on these factors: (1) the comfort & skill of the person who leads this portion of the service; (2) the size of the worship group (the larger the group, the more cumbersome it is to make it personally meaningful for those attending); (3) whether a microphone is necessary. The larger & more formalized this segment is, the less likely it will be effective.
20. There are people who are very attached to joys and sorrows. There are people who are very uncomfortable with joys and sorrows. -----
21. The mass candle-lighting (often 40-50 persons) is a source of irritation to me -- plus I am worried about the possibility of fire from all that flame in one place. We did put a warning in the order of service under the candle-lighting invitation that urges persons to light their candle from the nearest one instead of reaching over to light it from the chalice flame! I think it has helped, but I still worry and stand aside so that I can get to the flame-resistant cloth if necessary.
22. As a small, family church the dramatis personae in J&S are often a mystery to visitors, new members, and the minister.
23. we don't have joys and sorrows.
24. I think Joys and Sorrows helps congregation members know and care for each other in a more significant way. We occasionally have trouble with people talking too long or sharing what are really announcements--that can detract from the service and annoy visitors.
25. Some people do not like it others say it is their favorite part. Our current system balances the need for some to speak and the need to keep it from running on too long.
26. (Printed in the Order of Service) Sharing Of Joys, Sorrows, and Personal Milestones This is a time to share personal joys, sorrows, transitions and passages with the congregation. No announcements please. You may also place a seashell or river stone on the fountain during the time for sharing Joys and Sorrows or before the service begins. (Introduction of joys and sorrows) We come now to a time of sharing the passages of our life that remind us how fully alive we are and how much we are blessed by this religious community. If you have a joy, sorrow or milestone to share, please come forward, light a candle, speak into the microphone so all can hear and let us share with one another. You may want to share silently by placing a seashell, or river stone in the fountain to my left. Please come forward now for joys, sorrows and milestones. (Close joys and sorrows) Let us spend a moment in silent witness to all these passages shared out loud, acknowledging that there are other blessings and concerns we have that seem too large or tender to say out loud but are held in the strong arms of this community. Silence Ring chimes (wasn't enough space in #24 for these) Joys and Sorrows can be a very meaningful contribution -- it becomes extremely challenging when the same people frequently use joys and sorrows to report on more trivial events, or share lengthy personal information that seems better addressed in pastoral counseling, or to express concerns about political issues, or to make announcements about community events. We have worked on this, but at times it feels that we are continually monitoring this sharing -- to make it more a sharing that builds community.
27. People have told me how very important this is to them and how they completely look forward to this. As well, I don't think this congregation with its present constitution would ever allow for minister to compile and do an intercessory prayer. There is no way that could happen in this Fellowship. By and large, they love Joys and Sorrows. Some appreciate how I handle it when someone gets long winded. I sometimes have had to talk to someone about their lengthy discourse or suggest getting together with

them pastorally.

28. It would probably be difficult to eliminate J&C. What bothers me most is the few people who choose to light one at every service. I don't know why they do it.
29. I believe that joys and sorrows is doing the work of at least 10 different unmet needs in congregational life. It is meeting some people's need for attention/face time. It is meeting other people's need for outreach, other's needs for reaching out, others needs for intimacy, others needs for connection, other's needs for information. That's a lot of expectations to place on one ritual and expect it to maintain clarity and focus.
30. The Wednesday evening vespers meets the need of those who wish to light candles and express concerns directly. I know that the sharing of names and conditions on Sunday does provide a sense of staying informed, mutual caring, and community.
31. I am thinking of several congregations here. J&C works best in small, lay led congregations but it's usefulness diminishes with the size of the congregation and the amount of professional leadership in worship. J&C at its worst is self serving and inappropriate (the squirm factor). However, to the extent that it serves the pastoral care needs of a small congregation it is useful. Congregations transitioning away from the "open mic" method often do so by means of exercising control over the practice. Holding up a handful of candles - that's all, no more - is one. Restricting the practice to one Sunday per month is another. I've done both of these. Instead of control we need to acknowledge our need for healing and find a way, liturgically, to do that in a meaningful way.
32. It creates sacred space in which our connections to each other are strengthened. Congregants know to respect the ritual and use it appropriately.
33. We do not do verbal J & S, so we don't really know what people light candles for. But they have a space within the context of the service, and I am not sure that is not enough.
34. Joys and concerns is a strong part of the intergenerational part of our service. The minister or service leader makes it a point to acknowledge both spoken and unspoken. Program (worship) committee monitors both length and appropriateness of joys and concerns each month to ensure that it continues to serve us.
35. I think our use of joys and sorrows echoes the emphasis on each person's voice found in the use of consensus. Many people are pretty succinct in what they say, but we have many people who don't seem to notice that not everyone gets up and shares and that they themselves do a majority of the sharing. The ones who share the most often are the ones who share the smallest things. There's an inverse proportion between how frequently someone gets up and how truly a milestone the information shared is. That said, it's hugely important to the congregation to see itself as making a place for everyone. I would imagine that almost no one understands that in supposedly making a place for everyone, many are turned off -- and do not return. Worship leaders (and others) have not been able to hear that Joys and Sorrows practices such as ours contribute to keeping a church small. Re: question #19 above: the time is pretty well-managed, generally -- but I could use it instead in other ways, if we didn't have joys and concerns. For example, in a litany or in intercessory prayer or in a focus on making amends (or all of these). The actual deepest part of the service for many is my pastoral prayer. I would love to just weave in prayer requests with that.
36. VERY divisive! As I said, loved and hated. On the whole, however, I think they are a blessed part of the service. Generally, our congregation now has a "hang" of appropriate J&Cs sharing.
37. I like the ritual. In our church it is a wonderful time to reflect and think of others.
38. As we now are a congregation with 300 plus at worship each week, it is more of a challenge and yet it is still a very significant part our service and one of the things that makes us "real" for folks.
39. While joys and concerns can get out of hand, we have "trained" members to be more appropriate. I remember the Sunday that we decided to try the service without joys and concerns and a member was waiting for that morning to share that his sister had died. It was difficult for him. I also know that the increase in our attendance will make it more difficult to have that space in our service. It really is an important mechanism for our pastoral care team to know things that are happening that folks might not call someone about, but who may need a little extra care
40. It is a hot subject for debate. When the time is used well, it can be very powerful. However, when it is abused-as it frequently is-it can be devastating to the service. I have been really embarrassed some Sundays when visitors are present and joys and concerns is not going well.

41. We have a few members who don't attend the worship service any longer because of "Candles of Community" (our joys & concerns). We have many others who say it is the most meaningful part and say they would be extremely upset if we eliminated it.
42. If the ritual is removed from the service, I'd like to see a substitute that enables discovery as to what is on people's minds. Something like a joys and sorrows 'altar,' where people write joys and sorrows. These sometimes banal remarks give me something to speak to other members (adult and children) about after service. It is true that little Janey Doe's 5th birthday is not really big news, but it gives me the opportunity to squat down to her level and talk with her about something, and in doing so to make a connection. Make sure that elimination of joys and sorrows does not reduce the opportunities for connection.
43. It's a constant learning process--some people share the most mundane events, every week. Others never share.
44. The written J&C is a method of sharing that works for people who aren't comfortable speaking in front of the congregation. Sometimes it is hard to connect the J or C with the person if you don't know them. (In our process, the candles are lit and papers handed in one by one and then the minister or worship leader reads them all.)
45. You'll be sorry you asked! I am a long-time member and a church leader and have very strong opinions about this formed after 20 years of experience. I do not like turning over part of the service to congregants who are not trained in and sometimes have insufficient respect for the worship experience. We have had individuals abuse joys and concerns in the past and so we went to the mostly written format, which is certainly an improvement. Still, it takes too much time and is an unpredictable part of our service. This makes time planning difficult. Also, I believe this kind of sharing during worship develops a false sense of intimacy. Most people DON'T participate, so we have no idea what's going on with most congregants. The same people tend to share; some people never share. We certainly have too large a congregation for everyone to participate. Every week a number of congregants share experiences that are not relevant to the community--e.g., something that happened to a co-worker. When children are in the service many of them light candles for school starting or ending or a pet or whatever. This often goes on and on. I think this is fine for children's worship, but not for adult worship if for no other reason than it takes way too much time. Also, I fear that trivial sharing encourages selfishness and a magnification of oneself over community. (I wish parents would monitor this!) I am also often disturbed when people share personal information about others (e.g., a child with a learning disability; a sister who attempted suicide; a named friend with a drug abuse problem)--this is a violation of confidentiality and it worries me a lot. Finally, I believe this "small church" practice stifles growth. I would much prefer pastoral prayers to congregant joys and concerns. Finally, I would much rather have congregants share their life experiences in a way that allows for immediate response, comfort, or praise. I don't like hearing about someone's pregnancy or death in a public setting--I want to be able to congratulate or grieve with the individual.
46. They are one way we hold up the rich web of relational caring in the congregation up as sacred during worship.
47. I feel that joys and concerns are a vital part of what creates our very tightly knit community. No electronic notification could replace the value of hearing someone's voice. We have had children share their joys in wonderful spontaneous ways that made their presence vital to the congregation.
48. Our current method allows the sharing of feelings and events while giving the Minister control over the length, level of detail, and appropriateness. Best of both worlds.
49. I am quite pleased with the present system. I have visited other UU churches and seen abuses of the open microphone. I've also seen them at my home congregation. Never again! No open mics!
50. It is meeting needs better since more people are adhering to the process as a means of sharing personal life events; and not movie reviews or announcements they forgot to make
51. We call the time "joys and concerns". It is a very important part of our fellowship together, and it works well for our size. On occasion there may be someone who speaks for an inappropriate amount of time but it does not happen as often as it use to. I would imagine that as we grow larger, say 150+, we may need to consider other constraints/guidelines to J&Cs and maybe add inessential prayer.
52. We have not made changes to our joys and sorrows ritual in the past three years, other than to start ending it with a short intercessory prayer, but we have raised the issue and held several forums on the subject. My observation is that the number of offerings has decreased as a result and that trivial

announcements have become much less common.

53. As I've said in my earlier responses, I feel that joys and concerns are important in our small community. We keep in touch and acknowledge one another's lives through this ritual.
54. I could not answer the questions about how joys and sorrows contribute or impact growth etc., because I have no way to measure the impact of all the various elements of the worship service.
55. I think that the present format may be about as good as it will get for a congregation our size; I think it would be nice if more people's joys & concerns were shared out loud as a way to build caring in the community but time is always of the essence.
56. Joys and sorrows does not meet my needs, due to the fact that we have some people that always have something to share, and it is never brief, it is much too long winded. It takes so long, that whatever joy or sorrow I may have wanted to share, once or twice a year, I don't share, due to the length of time others have already taken. I would much prefer just the name given, or just a candle lit. We even have one kid who has to come up every Sunday and say something, usually fumbling around, trying to think of something to say, get a laugh, apparently looking for attention. I find it disrespectful to the ceremony, because his sharing is rarely serious.
57. Sometimes it is used as a political platform, and sometimes it seems that the joys or concerns expressed are not of significance -- but who can judge that?!
58. At times, we restrict the number. At other times, we use "prayers of the people" whereby names are spoken out loud.
59. I mostly enjoy J&C, but there are times that our implementation lends itself to becoming a distraction. Occasionally, someone will elicit applause, but then it seems like the congregation feels the need to applaud for everyone. It really does become a distraction when people plug their favorite sports team. Or worse, respond to election results.
60. I believe that Celebrations is important to the sharing of the life of the congregation and "People in Our Hearts and Thoughts" contributes to the feeling of a caring community. They have separate reasons for inclusion, separate impact and need to be separated.
61. As a member of the reviving Thomas Jefferson District Growth Council, I would be very interested in receiving more information about the survey and how we might work together to grow Unitarian Universalism. Before moving here, I was president of the Board of the UU Congregation of Annapolis. It was this Board that served during the transition from a pastoral to program/large church style.
62. Often new members use Joys and concerns to briefly introduce themselves to their new community in the offering.
63. It brings us closer together as a community.
64. Sharing joys, concerns, & milestones is a very important part of our time together. It strengthens the strong sense of community. They would be even better if we published at least a synopsis in the weekly e-announcements and/or the monthly newsletter so those not attending would also know to offer congratulations or sympathy as appropriate.
65. I very much like the way we do it but would like a candle in the sand and more follow through by caring committee and/or minister.
66. Generally, Joys and Concerns is a very good thing. There will always be people who go on too long, or talk about things that make you roll your eyes. Sometimes I am concerned about what visitors might think about some of them. But trying to control these aspects can be tricky. I hope you get some suggestions.
67. Encouraging folks to speak in a succinct manner is sometimes difficult, but seems to be getting better with good role modelling from members, plus the consulting minister directly asking people to share, but to be brief.
68. When we did a detailed survey last year, j/c were listed as a very important part of the Fellowship life, although some suggestions were made to make them more meditative and shorter. Thus we made the above changes.
69. By adding the opportunity for lighting silent candles and having a designated candle-lighter for spoken J&C, we seem to have struck the right balance. Most J&C are brief and appropriate and well-received by the congregation. There are exceptions to this every now and then. Another thing that we did (within

the past six months) is move spoken announcements to the end of the service. We encourage people to submit announcements early enough to be printed, but for those that are not, they are kept for the end of the hour.

70. Except for word of mouth, this is the primary way we learn of personal celebrations, illness, loss each others' lives. It is a small congregation going through a shift in culture (swinging from retirees to working families, humanists to a more spiritual bent) and I sense many people feel joys and concerns helps everyone maintain the intimacy and family feel of a small church and a sense of tradition.
71. There are too many insignificant sharings--people who say who they visited last week while on vacation, etc.
72. Joys and concerns is a very important part of our community. It is our sacrament. It allows us to express our beloved community and that each of us is important. It is something that is important for all ages. For many it is a central part of what it is to be UU
73. J&S in which congregations members participate is, generally speaking, a waste of precious worship time and, in fact, has little or nothing to do with worship. The practice most denigrates into announcements and trivia (my cat has just had kittens)
74. I understand the practical problems that are raised by Joys & Concerns in the format we currently use, but it was the element of the service that struck me the most as a visitor and now (8 years later) I still find it one of the most important parts of the service for a variety of reasons. Giving it up or changing it significantly would be a real loss and I have not yet heard a plan that I find to be a satisfying replacement. I hear similar sentiments from other members of the congregation all the time.
75. It's slightly different each week, but this is close: At this time in our service, we pause briefly to honor those moments we share as human beings--those times of supreme joy and of unutterable sorrow. In sharing these times, we lighten our burden of sorrow and our joys are multiplied. This is not a time for announcements, political statements or expressions of personal anger. This is a time to share moments of human experience that draw us together as a congregation. If you have something to share, please come forward, tell us your name and what's on your mind.
76. There are folks in our congregation who feel VERY STRONGLY about joys and concerns. The movement to having them at the end of the service has helped tremendously. They used to go on TOO long with things mentioned that were not very important; now folks are more serious and are not as likely to light a candle for getting new carpet or whatever.