

Post-Election Message



REV. DR. MICHAEL TINO
Lead Ministry Team,
Church of the Larger
Fellowship

The results of the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election have been devastating for many of us. The election of Donald Trump to a second term as President is more than worrying for all of us grounded in a commitment to love and liberation – we know that his fascist and authoritarian agenda threatens the lives and well-being of many of us and our beloveds. The following message was shared online by Rev. Dr. Michael Tino on the day after the election.

NOVEMBER 6, 2024

Beloveds,

I am trembling today with grief and fear. I am finding it hard to breathe, even as I force myself to focus on ways of breathing meant to calm my body. I hugged my child extra long this morning as she left for school—it was all I could do at that moment.

I am reminded again and again of my relative privilege right now. My BIPOC friends remind me that this is exactly who the United States has always been. It doesn't make it easier. I am mourning a nation that has never really existed, and knowing that doesn't make the grief less.

Perhaps you are feeling some of this, too. Please know that you are not alone.

At some point, we will figure out what we need to do next to protect those who are most vulnerable right now. At some point, we will be part of a movement to save the lives of those who are threatened by the fascist agenda that won the day in yesterday's US elections. That doesn't need to be today (even if we know it's coming).

Right now, I am reminding myself that I am part of a faith grounded in love. A faith that always has been and always will be profoundly counter-cultural. I am leaning on my faith ancestors to guide me, and I am trusting that my faith community will rise to the challenge presented to us.

I invite you to pray with me (or center yourself, or meditate):

O love that will not let us go, remind us of your presence now.

Remind us of your power now.

Remind us of your tenacity now.

Fill us with your strength that we might know ourselves connected to a love greater than we can imagine.

For we will need that love as we move forward together. Amen.

Yours in faith,
Rev. Michael

Quest

Vol. LXXVIII, No 10

2024

“We must take care of our families, wherever we find them.”

ELIZABETH GILBERT

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FAMILY

How do you define family? What role has family played in your life?

GEORGE P

CLF member, incarcerated in TN

Family is generally thought of as one's parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. The Vikings had two words for family: Kin and Kith. Kin was the traditional family that one is born into. Kith is the people that one chooses to have as family.

The family bond is one of the strongest bonds one can ever form. When we are born, we rely on someone to be our caretaker. To watch over, feed and protect us. Unfortunately, this is not always our biological parents. Yet, it is my experience that every person I have ever talked to has had at least one person in their life that they call family.

We are social beings and have an innate desire to be a part of a greater whole. Some people may have actual family bonds, some may have turned to the streets and joined an organization. Some may form tight bonds with fellow inmates. The truth of the matter is this: **WE ARE ALL FAMILY!** Each and every one of us. I may have never met you before, and we may never meet. But you are still my siblings within the Church of the Larger Fellowship.



PHOTO BY OLEKSANDR BROVKO ON UNSPLASH

Don't get me wrong, I'm not just talking to those who are incarcerated. I'm also talking to those of you who work for CLF. You may not be incarcerated but you too are our siblings.

Every year during the Yule / Christmas season, we all get little reminders from people we don't know that we are not forgotten. The truth of the matter is, those of you who work behind the scenes and help orchestrate all of this – YOU are not forgotten. I

for one thank you for all you do for those of us that are incarcerated. And I am proud to be a part of the CLF family.

We are Unitarian Universalists, no matter what age, creed, faith, orientation, sexuality, color, etc. Together we stand, helping one another to rise above their personal pitfalls. Lending an ear to listen, a shoulder to lean on. Celebrating triumphs together. If that is not kith and kin, **FAMILY**, then I don't know what is. ■

ROBERT

CLF member, incarcerated in MA

For me, family is the pinnacle of life, the number one goal. Growing up, I had been told I'd never be able to have one to call my own.

Now that's not to say that growing up I didn't have a family, or that I didn't have people who cared for and loved me. My parents were divorced, but they both wanted the best for me and cared for me as any loving parent would. Birthdays, holidays, gatherings, the whole kit and caboodle.

But to have a partner in life, kids to raise, those in my life that depended on me, rather than me depending on them – that I was told I'd never be able to have. So I had two choices in front of me: accept that as my fate, or fight for it, find that one for me.

I fought. I found her. Did it take some time, yes, but for me, it was most definitely worth it. To be able to have people to love and care for, that cared and loved me, depended on me, is a privilege that I was most grateful for. To be a part of someone's life, from its inception, to guide throughout all their trials and tribulations, was the paragon of what it meant to live.

Now, none of them are in my life. Do I hold hope that we can be together once more? Yes. Until that time, I hold those memories close. Of you, I ask this: if you have family, tell them you love them, for you never know when it'll be your last moment with them. ■

Summer In The South

GARY

CLF member, incarcerated in SC

Going swimming at Ritter's Lake.
 A butterfly flutters...
 Can we go for ice cream?
 It lands lightly on my hand...
 Are we cooking out tonight?
 It flutters away, back again...
 Churning tubs of homemade ice cream,
 The butterfly studies me...
 Fishing and a picnic in the park,
 It flaps its wings gently...
 Family reunions.
 Delicate colors, ethereal...
 Catching lightning bugs at dusk.
 Its feet, tiny, tickles my finger...
 TV reruns and shopping for school clothes.
 Until it flits away, leaving me in awe.
 Memories of a family's many gifts:
 vacations at the beach
 backyard watermelon cuttings
 July 4th fireworks
 Growing up in a Southern Family.

JACOB

CLF member, incarcerated in AR

Family is the chosen nucleus of our lives. It is the ones we turn to seek out for solace / comfort, the ones we can show our true face to. Family is not defined by blood, but by choices and actions. Over time, blood may

turn on blood. The feeling of ostracization due to sexual orientation has been the cause of that in my own life. These experiences have led me to find my chosen family, a mix of blood and not blood who have helped me keep pushing through. Family is our ultimate close-knit support system. ■

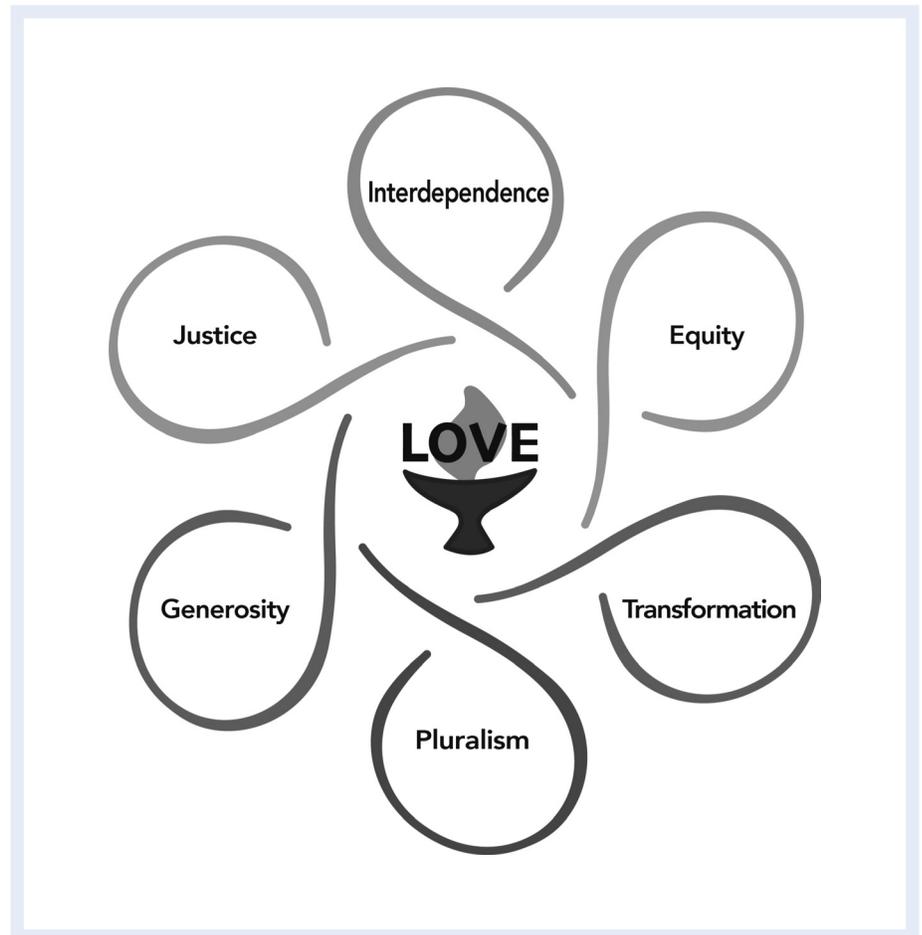
The Promises of Family



CHRISTINA RIVERA
Lead Ministry Team,
Church of the Larger
Fellowship

Family is one of those topics that can be both celebrated and filled with tension. Sometimes at the same time! It can bring to mind images of parents, children, siblings—those bound by blood or marriage. And within a liberatory theology, family is something more. It can be a chosen, dynamic, and inclusive concept that welcomes all, just as we are. When we speak of family as Unitarian Universalists, we are called to expand our definition beyond the typical Western idea of family. We are called to understand that family is not something we have but something we build, together.

Western culture is generally considered to be an “I” culture. These cultures have characteristics in which the person is the center and include the idealized version of the nuclear family: mother, father, children. However, if we just scratch the surface of Western culture, we find the vast influences of the global Southern majority and our “We” cultures, in which the community is the center. A “We” culture includes chosen family, identity families, and community family. And while “We” culture is not as widely acknowledged; it is more widely practiced.



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The exciting news is that our newly affirmed UU values centering Love, Justice, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, Interdependence, and Generosity can help us in our framing of family. Family doesn't have to be confined to those who share our DNA but rather, it can embrace those who share in the journey of life with us. In this sense, family is a covenant of love and support, a relationship defined by care, mutual respect, and shared commitment.

And in thinking about that covenant of love and looking at the “I” culture of family, we can see how it can feel limiting and sometimes even harmful. We must ask ourselves: what about those who don't fit that mold? What about those who find their deepest sense of belonging in friendships, in chosen family, in their communities? What about family who have hurt us?

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Family, continued from page 4

I think some of those questions can be answered if we look to the lessons from “We” culture. A culture in which family can be the person who sits beside you during difficult times, the neighbor who cares for your children when you’re in need, or the community that rallies around you in times of celebration or sorrow. These relationships are just as sacred, just as valuable, as those bound by biology.

In fact, they may be more intentional and powerful precisely because they are chosen. And they have the added benefit of being able to ask harmful people to move away from community for the time it takes for them to heal and take responsibility for actions. This isn’t a shunning, but rather in the best practice of family, accompanied by non-affected individuals, the person doing harm can have support while they seek to address the issues which led them to harm.

Don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying that “We” cultures have it all figured out and that everything is perfect and rosy. Harm still happens, conflict still exists. But still — no one is thrown

away. No one is beyond the hope of God’s love. We simply understand that we don’t need to participate in harm by saying, “oh, that person is family so that’s why they get to keep doing what they do and hurting people.” Rather we say, “you need some time out of community with some folks who can help you heal so that you don’t continue to harm others.” It doesn’t always work, and that is the beauty of our UU commitment to covenant. We can keep practicing so that we do better the next time.

At its heart, family—whether born or chosen—is a covenant. It is a promise to care for one another, to show up when it’s hard, to forgive, and to grow together. As a UU community, we strive to model this kind of covenant at the CLF. We strive to be a place where individuals find the family they may not have experienced in their own lives. It is within these sacred spaces that we nurture one another, celebrate milestones, and bear witness to life’s sorrows and challenges. Our Unitarian Universalist values challenge us to constantly examine and dismantle systems of oppression that prevent people from forming families in ways that reflect their truth. Whether it’s advocating for

marriage equality, defending reproductive rights, naming the ongoing genocide in Gaza, or ensuring access to healthcare and childcare, we are called to create a world where every family can thrive. We must continually ask ourselves: Who is the “We” we are talking about and centering? Who is being left out? How can we do better?

In my own life, I have found that family is not something that has stayed exactly the same from season to season. It is one that changes and requires constant attention, love, and patience. We never get it 100% right, we are always asking for grace.

In the end, family, like justice, is love made visible. It is the place where we practice our Unitarian Universalist values, where we learn what it means to live in covenant with one another. Whether through birth, choice, or circumstance, we are all called to create and nurture families that reflect the beauty of our shared humanity. And in doing so, we honor that divine spark of the holy which is within each of us and live into the beloved community that is at the heart of our faith. So say we all and amen. ■



PHOTO BY AINĀRS CEKULS ON UNSPLASH

Leadership Development: Building Engagement and Growth for the Future of CLF



NOMINATING COMMITTEE
Church of the Larger Fellowship

The CLF is a unique community. Each of us brings individual perspective, experiences, and geography and together we shape our congregation. The Board and Nominating Committee believe our strength comes from the connections and leadership that grow out of our community—you. This year, we are exploring ways for you to get more involved—beyond the elected roles or traditional volunteer opportunities.

We know that a sustainable organization thrives when there are clear processes in place to help members grow from connection to engagement and ultimately to leadership. It's not just about filling roles—it's about cultivating the gifts, passions, and skills that each of you bring to the CLF. We want to create a supportive environment where everyone has the chance to explore how they can contribute meaningfully, whether through short-term projects, ongoing volunteer roles, or leadership positions.

Our goal is to provide more intentional opportunities for you to engage with the CLF in ways that fit your unique talents and interests. This approach allows us to nurture future leaders who feel empowered



PHOTO BY MIKE ERSKINE ON UNSPLASH

and ready to step into roles that help sustain and grow our beloved community.

Together, we can build a vibrant, inclusive future for the CLF—one where every member has the opportunity to lead, engage, and contribute in ways that are meaningful to them. Thank you for being part of this journey with us. Your involvement is not just appreciated; it is essential to the

continued vitality of the CLF.

NOTE: Our normal process of recruiting, nominating, and electing board positions will continue on its regular schedule beginning in January. If you are interested in CLF leadership beginning in June 2025, email us at nominating@clfu.org or write to the Nominating Committee at 24 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210. ■



We have a podcast now!

Our weekly worship services are now available on Apple Podcasts at this URL:

TITLE	Church of the Larger Fellowship UU Worship
CREATOR	Church of the Larger Fellowship
URL	https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/church-of-the-larger-fellowship-uu-worship/id1769003519

We know that only some of our members can access these services. We hope that you are able yet we also know that many facilities may not allow it. You may need to contact the chaplain at your facility. You may need to find it on a specific vendor. Please let us know how it's going for you. We're eager to know if you're able to listen and how we can try to make it more accessible.

With the hope that, through this podcast, more of our members who are incarcerated or have limited internet access can experience our weekly worship services, we'd also love to include more of your words in upcoming services! Instead of a regular "For Your Reflection" section below, we're asking for submission of chalice lighting words that can be used in worship. See below for more details.

WORDS FOR WORSHIP

To submit your words for possible inclusion in a future CLF online worship service, tear off your answer and mail it back to us using the envelope included in the middle of this issue, or mail a separate piece of paper with your submission.

All Unitarian Universalist worship service begin by the lighting of a flaming chalice, the symbol of our faith, accompanied by words. These words are usually brief (3-5 lines) and speak to the spirit in which we gather (example below). Please use this page to submit your own chalice lighting words, for possible inclusion in a future CLF worship service.

EXAMPLE

Chalice Lighting from Rev. JeKaren Olaoya

We light this chalice
As we come together
To center love
To create community
To honor the world we live in

If you would like us to be able to publish or share your writing, remember to include "You have permission to edit and publish my words" somewhere on your submission.



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