

Love at the Center: Our Shared UU Values and Covenant

Quest SEEKER ISSUE

Vol. LXXIV, No 7

2025

A fundamental part of Unitarian Universalism is that ours is a living faith—that our understanding of what holds us together and what is important changes over time as our consciousness about our world grows. Another is that our faith is defined by covenant—by sacred promises that we make to one another about how we are going to be together in this world.

For nearly 40 years, our congregations promised to affirm and promote a set of principles and sources. In 2024, we completed a five-year-long review of that covenant and replaced it with a covenant based on a shared set of values. Each value is accompanied by a statement of how we hope to put that value into action in our lives and our congregations.

Our values now explicitly place love at the center of our faith. We are called to use love in our decision making, in our planning, in our responses to injustice and evil, and in our relationships. We are called to develop a “spiritual discipline of love” that informs how we approach our other values as well.

The other values—justice, equity, transformation, pluralism, interdependence, and generosity—flow from the love at the center of our faith. Love calls us to make our world more just. Love calls us to proclaim that every person is worthy

Rev. Dr. Michael Tino,
Co-Lead Ministry Team



just as they are. Love calls us to share our gifts with one another. Love calls us into relationships in which the possibility of healing is present. Love calls us to honor diversity of belief and identity. And love calls us to keep growing.

How do you understand love at work in your life? To what is love calling you? How would your life change if your decisions began with the questions, “What is the most loving decision I can make in this moment?” “What action would increase love in this world the most?” and “How am I living my commitment to love with my decision?”

As a spiritual discipline, love must be a practice. It must be something we return to again and again. It must be something we fail at sometimes, something we learn to get better at over time.

As a spiritual discipline central to our faith, it must be something we help each other with. In your practice of Unitarian Universalism, you should be learning to love better. We should be learning this together as a community.

Let us learn to love. Let us learn to love better. Let us learn to love better together. Amen and Blessed Be. ■

“COVENANTAL
RELATIONSHIP IS AT
THE HEART OF UU
FAITH, AND THE CLF
OFFERS A RADICAL
INTERPRETATION OF
THAT MESSAGE.”

REV. SARAH PRICKETT, FORMER CLF
LEARNING FELLOW

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Unitarian Universalist Shared Values

In 2024, congregational delegates to the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly voted to adopt the following values and covenant as part of our Association's by-laws.

Love. The power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values.

We are accountable to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of Love.

Interdependence. We honor the interdependent web of all existence.

With reverence for the great web of life and with humility, we acknowledge our place in it. We covenant to protect Earth and all beings from exploitation. We will create and nurture sustainable relationships of care and respect, mutuality and justice. We will work to repair harm and damaged relationships.

Pluralism. We celebrate that we are all sacred beings, diverse in culture, experience, and theology.



We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities with love, curiosity, and respect.

Justice. We work to be diverse multicultural Beloved Communities where all thrive.

We covenant to dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression. We support the use of inclusive democratic processes to make decisions within our congregations, our Association, and society at large.

Transformation. We adapt to the changing world.

We covenant to collectively transform and grow spiritually and ethically. Openness to change is fundamental to our Unitarian and Universalist heritages, never complete and never perfect.

Generosity. We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope.

We covenant to freely and compassionately share our faith, presence, and resources. Our generosity connects us to one another in relationships of interdependence and mutuality.

Equity. We declare that every person is inherently worthy and has the right to flourish with dignity, love, and compassion.

We covenant to use our time, wisdom, attention, and money to build and sustain fully accessible and inclusive communities. ■

The CLF Meets You Where You Are

The CLF is a place that counts among its members people from all backgrounds, ethnicities and races. The blessing of not being limited to one geographical location affords us the opportunity to be accessible to anyone and everyone across the globe. We welcome anyone who wants to be connected to community and feel the love and care that space affords—including those incarcerated here in the United States.

As Unitarian Universalists, we are called on to affirm the humanity of every person. How can love unite us in times where it seems the divisions are insurmountable?

What other choice do we have, but to do all we can to center love and liberation? To answer the call of this greater love that calls us into being?

Each week we gather in online worship and during our weekly podcast *The Voices of Unitarian Universalism*, affectionately known as *The VUU* (pronounced view).

Our worship leaders invite us to connect to ourselves, each other and world events. We cry, laugh, and support each other during hard times.

The VUU is going strong in its thirteenth season. We invite thought leaders from diverse disciplines and inevitably find ways to challenge ourselves and each other to make this world a better place.

We are leading the way in our denomination in teaching about what it means to be an abolitionist. We center community care and love for all. We advocate for a society that cares first, not punishes first.

AISHA HAUSER, MSW
Lead Ministry Team



Every person is worthy of surviving and thriving, of loving and being loved. As a covenantal faith, we enter into agreements of how we will love, honor and affirm each other and all living beings and our living earth.

We are invited to turn to love rooted in liberation. Love that affirms every human being in the fullness of who they are and how they show up in the world. ■



PHOTO BY MALCOLM BROSTROM ON UNSPLASH

Meditation on Radiance

Even if we don't see it through bars or bricks, the sun still comes up. It rises each day whether we watch it or not. Its warmth does not depend on how "good" we are, or what we have done or failed to do. It simply shows up, faithfully. That's how I like to think about grace, or love, or God, or whatever name you give the sacred. It's not a reward for good behavior. It's something that simply *is*, something we can lean into. Just like the sun, it rises for all of us.

There will be days when you forget this. There will be days when the world seems colder, harsher, or more unfair than your spirit can bear. There may be days when you feel like you're disappearing, like your light is being swallowed by grief, rage, or isolation. When those days come, and they will, please remember this: Your worth does not burn out. Your radiance may dim or hide, but it is never gone. You do not have to shine for others to believe it exists. *You are still you.*

So breathe deep. Let whatever warmth you can find, maybe in memories, music, friendship, faith, remind you of your light. You don't need to earn it. You don't need to explain it. You don't need to make yourself smaller to fit someone else's idea of who you should be. You are a bearer of radiance, a child of the cosmos, a living flame. No wall, no sentence, no judgment can take that from you. ■



Katherine Hofmann,
CLF Learning Fellow

Meditación sobre la Radiancia

Aunque no lo veamos a través de barrotes o ladrillos, el sol sale. Sale cada día, lo veamos o no. Su calor no depende de lo "buenos" que seamos, ni de lo que hayamos hecho o dejado de hacer. Simplemente aparece, fielmente. Así es como me gusta pensar en la gracia, el amor, Dios o como se le llame a lo sagrado. No es una recompensa por el buen comportamiento. Es algo que simplemente *es*, algo en lo que podemos confiar. Al igual que el sol, sale para todos nosotros.

Habrás días en que lo olvides. Habrá días en que el mundo te parezca más frío, más duro o más injusto de lo que tu espíritu puede soportar. Puede que haya días en que sientas que desapareces, como si tu luz se la tragara el dolor, la rabia o el aislamiento. Cuando lleguen esos días, y llegarán, por favor recuerda esto: tu valor no se apaga. Tu resplandor puede atenuarse u ocultarse, pero nunca desaparece. No tienes que brillar para que otros crean que existes. *Sigues siendo tú.*

Así que respira hondo. Deja que cualquier calor que encuentres, ya sea en los recuerdos, la música, la amistad, la fe, te recuerde tu luz. No necesitas ganársela. No necesitas explicar. No necesitas empequeñecerte para encajar en la idea que alguien tiene de quién deberías ser. Eres un portador de resplandor, un hijo del cosmos, una llama viva. Ningún muro, ninguna sentencia, ningún juicio puede te lo quitar. ■



PHOTO BY TATENDA MAPIGOTI ON UNSPLASH

In the Mirror

BY ANDY S.

Left is right
and I wonder what else
I am. I am
Woman. I am man.
I am us. I am them.
Searching.
Searching.
For something in between
the line we've drawn.
Our sword we've drawn.
Our swords reflect the light, too.
Here on the battlefield the roles
we play,
as seen in the enemy's eyes,
become assumed
and so we know that
if everything reflected is a lie
then there is no truth.
Of course the sky is blue,
and I would never deny you
the right to choose your own
name.
But the day turns to night
and the stars were there all
along.
So we assume.
And thus, there must be truth,
somewhere behind the reflection,
somewhere behind the enemy's
eyes.

Reflection on Pluralism

As a young person, I was introduced to many versions and visions of the world (political, cultural, religious, historical) that were presented to me as sacred or scientific facts. However, my curiosity and lived experience encouraged me to ask the “hard questions” even when those questions scared me.

The journey of asking questions has resulted at this point in my life, identifying as a “demi-theistic, humanist mystic. What does that mean?

It means specifically:

1. I usually hold some version of a “God Concept” or concept of the ultimate/divine; however, if my “God Concept” is a barrier to conjuring a world where all can thrive, then I will grieve it and release that concept.
2. I unapologetically integrate the scientific and the metaphysical or spiritual into my understanding of faith.

I imagine that someone reading this may be asking the question “how can you claim and embody ideas and concepts that are understood by many as incompatible?”

My answer to this question can be reduced to one single value. A value that has been quietly cultivating my imagination and my awareness for many years. A value that for most of that time I had no name for. That

value is *pluralism*.

As a minister, scholar, teacher, and artist, I have discovered that pluralism may be my most foundational value because:

- Pluralism makes space for: innovation, experimentation, uncertainty, curiosity and possibilities beyond our present knowledge.
- Pluralism is a value and practice that honors the multiplicity and interconnectedness of all existence.
- Pluralism must be at the center of any vision of a world where all people can thrive.
- Pluralism exposes the dangers of worshiping: oneness, certainty, “universality”, and cultural specificity marketed and imposed on others as the “only way.”

I have no regrets for following the path of the seeker.

If you find yourself with more questions than answers, congratulations my friend, you are on the path of the seeker and we here at The Church of the Larger Fellowship, are more than glad to accompany you on your journey.

Enjoying the ride. ■



Rev. Donte' Hilliard,
CLF Learning Fellow

Behold My Soul

BY GARY F.

Handcuffed behind my back
 Strip Searched before complete
 strangers
 Made To Stand at attention
 Bare feet on sticky concrete
 Locked in a cell alone
 Under 24 hour observation
 Nothing but me, my mind and
 A harsh Fluorescent light
 Nothing to do but
 To do but eat and sleep
 The choice to be a victim of my
 past
 Or a warrior in the making
 Everything taken but my attitude
 Hatred and violence are never
 the answer
 They may cage my body
 BUT my mind and soul remain
 my own
 Chaos swirls and tensions rise
 A miasma of turmoil
 I let my response live in art,
 writing, poetry
 My fellow warriors are Money,
 Wilde, Frost
 I release the pain onto paper
 The system seeks to strip my
 identity
 My very humanity
 but I resist
 For I am not an animal
 I will not be complicit in my own
 oppression
 Behold my soul!

No One Is Disposable

Foundational to Unitarian Universalist theology is the notion that every person's worthiness and dignity are inherent to their being. That is to say that nothing that someone does, however heinous we might consider it, makes them disposable as a human being.

This is a profound challenge to a social structure that thrives on hierarchy, and a profound challenge to an economic system that relies on disposable human capital. As CLF Board member Heather Gatland says, our faith's insistence on this flies in the face of the "lie of disposable worth" that systems of inequity and injustice rely on.

Because the ministry of the CLF has no geographical location, it is able to serve people who are isolated. When we began as a congregation, this simply meant that they were too far away from a bricks-and-mortar congregation. Today, we understand this differently. Some people are isolated because of the ableism of our society. Some people are isolated because of the ways in which systems of oppression play out in

Rev. Dr. Michael Tino,
 Co-Lead Ministry Team



local communities. And some people are isolated because they have been incarcerated.

Among our members, CLF is proud to serve over 2,000 incarcerated Unitarian Universalists in our Worthy Now Prison Ministry. These beloveds are isolated and dehumanized daily by a system that has deemed them disposable. We know better. We insist on better. We insist daily that all people are worthy of love and respect.

Being a part of the CLF makes you a part of our insistence on centering love and care. For everyone—no exceptions. It makes you part of our understanding that no one can be reduced to the worst thing they've ever done (or been accused of doing). It makes you part of our resistance to a society that wants to throw people away.

No one is disposable to CLF. No one is disposable to Unitarian Universalism. No one is disposable. ■



PHOTO BY NIK SHULIAHIN ON UNSPLASH

Black Soul

BY EDWARD W.

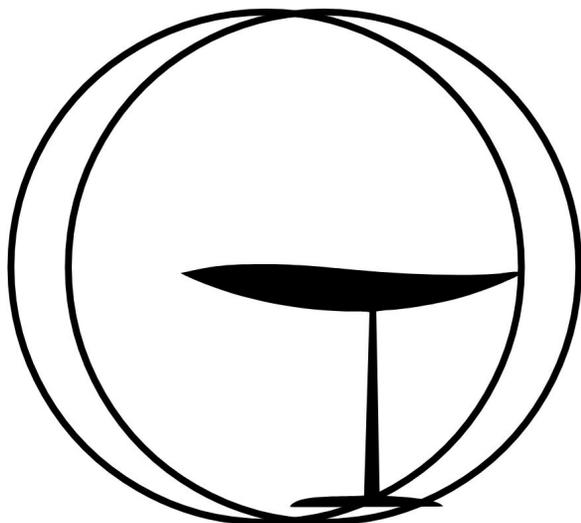
We need a new world.
 This one is trashed.
 This planet is crying.
 We get to watch it crash!
 Whose hand will you be holding?
 When the truth comes out.
 My cards are folding.
 What is my life about?
 My soul was black.
 Like the tattoos on my skin.
 Now that I'm worthy, I'm happy.
 Fellowship will begin.
 I need a fresh start, but I do not
 know how.
 I was feeling so empty.
 But I'm Worthy Now.



PHOTO BY ALEKSANDRA SAPOZHNIKOVA ON UNSPLASH

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH US

To share your thoughts, 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 writing.



We invite you to reflect on the ways you carry the flame.

Draw, write or collage a representation of the chalice flame in the image.



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