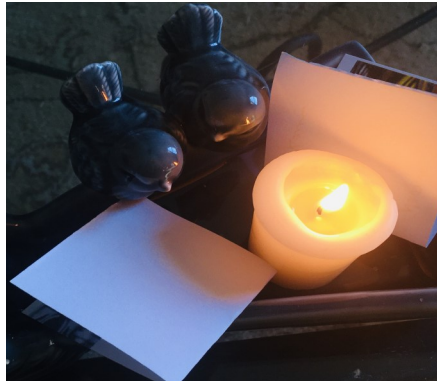




March's Theme is Commitment

Commitment

By The Rev. Heather Janules



At the end of February, the Soul Matters covenant group gathered online to discuss the theme of that month which was "Beloved Community."

One thing that makes the Soul Matters group meaningful is the invitation to take part in spiritual practices throughout the month related to the theme and to then share our experiences of the practice with the group. When it was my turn, this is an expanded version of the story I told:

I sometimes feel like a ministerial imposter, especially when someone asks me to pray for them. My prayer life is rather casual and informal so I fear that those who make this request might be disappointed by my lack of conscious attention.

Many in the congregation have received a text from me as I walk around Horn Pond which is usually my time each day to dwell on those I care about. But, despite the beautiful photo of the pond I may send with my short, "thinking of you" message, there are no beads, no

kneeling, no incense, no whispering of ancient appeals to the Divine. The people and ducks and dogs I pass certainly would not think I was engaging in a spiritual practice as I walked. The beauty of the pond does pull me out of the business of the day, delivering me to a reflective place where I can think about those facing life's challenges...but it is not traditional prayer.

I began to feel better about my casual prayer practice when I remembered a passage in Barbara Brown Taylor's book An Altar in the World. (Perhaps you remember this story from our "Sacred Space Everywhere" service.) Brown Taylor is a renowned and beloved Episcopal priest. I shared her description of how she "keeps people in her prayers" in that service. She, too – this revered minister – says she is "bad at prayer: She writes:

Since I am a failure at prayer, I keep an altar in my room. It is an old vanity, made of rosewood. I keep some icons on it and a lot of candles. When people ask me to pray for them, I write their names on small pieces of paper and put them in a small brass box that sits in front of two

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March's Theme is Commitment

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paintings, one of Jesus and one of his mother. Most nights the altar just sits there, holding all those pictures, wicks, and names.

One of my hopes for my recent short sabbatical was learning to slow down and to take better care of my body, mind and spirit. Perhaps it was this extended time of catching my breath but I became motivated to create and commit to a more conscious spiritual practice when it came to caring for our Beloved Community. In short, I wanted to become less "bad at prayer."

It came together organically. Someone offered to give away a beautiful blue ceramic dish with birds around its rim on one of my on-line groups. This, I thought, would be the vessel for my candle and "name papers." After I picked up the dish, I began meditating at least ten minutes each day with a lit candle in the dish's center. Next to the candle are slips of paper with the names of those I know are struggling. Some of these names are known to me; some are strangers. Recently, I just wrote "Texas" on the paper, thinking about the thousands of people trying to recover and rebuild after the winter storm.

As many have found, it feels good to begin the day with a little medita-

tion. And it feels good to be more mindful about those I am committed to through ministry. And ministry is one way I practice my commitments to life.

As we do with our worship services, having shared this story first with the covenant group and now you, dear reader, I ask you some questions for reflection:

What do you regularly do to demonstrate your commitments to life?

What spiritual practices are you committed to that nurture your mind, body and spirit?

However you answer these questions, just know that despite the physical distance between all of us right now, through the commitments we make to one another in our congregation, our connections remain. We are all just one text from the pond, lit candle or scribbled note away from one another. Each tie, each bond of commitment, a blessing.

PS: Speaking of commitments reminds me of covenants and our covenant groups. Returning from sabbatical, I have noticed how many people are tired, sad and lonely, now a full year into the pandemic. Participating in small group ministry can provide some of the spiritual nurture that may be hard to find in

this time.

Our covenant groups meet regularly, with meetings beginning with an opening reading and chalice lighting. Each person checks in about how they are doing and then there is a focused conversation on a pre-determined subject. The meeting concludes with a closing reading. As named, the Soul Matters covenant group also includes spiritual practices plus a packet of theme-related materials and a number of provocative and reflective questions about the theme. With all the groups, there is a covenant, a collective promise about how to be together to ensure a safe group experience and to promote deep listening and sharing. If you think you might be interested in joining a Covenant Group, please contact Rev. Heather at: heather.janules@winchesteruu.org or (781) 729-0949.

**Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.**
John Wesley, English cleric

April's Theme is Becoming

By The Rev. Heather Janules

As you can imagine, I spend much less time in the WUS building these days than I used to. Periodically, I come by to drop things off or pick things up. When I am in my office, I always notice the calendar posted on the wall.

The calendar was a gift from the Equal Justice Initiative. The month of March features a photo of an incredible mural of Harriet Tubman painted on the side of the Harriet Tubman Museum and Education Center in Cambridge, Maryland, the region where she once lived and did her courageous, life-saving work.

While the quality of the artistry is part of what makes the mural special, the way Tubman appears to break through the wall, lean forward and extend her hand to the viewer makes the image and the power of Tubman's work come alive. When asked why he made this choice, muralist Michael Rosato states that "the inspiration comes from that moment when [an enslaved person] has to make a decision to go. This incredibly strong and compassionate woman is about to offer that hand for that freedom. And I thought, *How do I capture that moment where it all happens, when the risk was taken to run from the [enslaver], to a woman taking a risk to bring you through to the oth-*

er side?"

(<https://visitdorchester.org/new-harriet-tubman-mural-goes-viral/>)

If you look closely at the calendar, you will notice something that complicates its presence on the wall of my office. This calendar is a 2020



calendar, not 2021. When quarantine first began, I didn't have the time or mental capacity to pay attention to details in my office like flipping the calendar the occasions I was there. Eventually, once I noticed the calendar was WAY out of date, I decided to keep it stuck on March as a reminder of how, in some ways, time stopped for all of us in March of 2020.

As I write this reflection, we are nearing the one-year anniversary - of quarantine, of pandemic ministry, of virtual work and school, of

cancelled events and rites-of-passage, of more than 500,000 gone, countless others debilitated and so many struggling to make it financially. This has also been a year of great cultural and political struggle.

The theme for March, 2021 is "Becoming." This March, this image of Harriet Tubman takes additional meaning for me as we seem to be reaching if not the end of the pandemic then the beginning of the end. The Tubman mural depicts an invitation to break through: from enslavement to freedom, from incarceration behind a wall to the expansive horizon, from one physical and spiritual state to another. While a radically different context, we too are on the edge of transitioning from one life to another.

When I think of "Becoming" in this time, I return to the questions that have arisen throughout the pandemic: "How will this experience change us? Who do we want to be when we emerge on the other side?" Or "What will we *become* as a result of living through this historic time?"

I don't know the answer to these questions yet – none of us do as we are still on the pandemic "side of the wall" – but I have a sense of the

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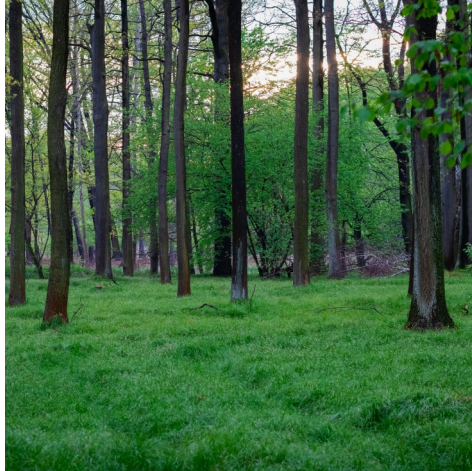
May's Theme is Story

By Rebecca Kelley Morgan, Director of Lifespan Religious Education

When I've led storytelling workshops or classes, I encourage use of an introduction before easing into a narrative. It's a technique used to claim space and to give everyone a chance to know your voice and settle in before your narrative tale begins.

Anyone who has heard me offer first reflections at Winchester Unitarian Society probably recognizes a couple of my favorites. "Once upon a time, when I was a girl, AND DINOSAURS ROAMED THE EARTH..." or "Once upon a time, before there were churches and before there were preachers, before there were classes and before there were teachers and before there was EVER SUCH A THING KNOWN AS INTER-GENERATIONAL WORSHIP... There were circles on the great savannahs, clearings in the forest and fires lit under the stars where all gathered, young and old to hear and learn according to their own way of understanding".

Humans have been using symbols to communicate and express themselves for hundreds of thousands of years. Although there is no such thing as fossilized language, it is likely that speech developed at about the same time. Our symbols evolved to what we have today,



human speech – spoken and signed, pictorial, lettered and multimedia methods of recording events and ideas that capture history and communicate those ideas with each other.

In language, a word is an agreed upon symbol for an object - say apple or banana - rather than the object itself. And that brings me back to story. We have story themes that repeat themselves. They are so common in the lore, across cultures, that they have been cataloged and categorized in a numeric system. (As an example, in the ATU index, stories with Magic Objects are numbered 560-649 including the gem, #570, Bunnies Beware of the King). Although there is a genre of fact-based storytelling, many stories are removed from our ordinary reality, and that disassociation can allow us to plumb the deeper truths of stories. Stories are a set of symbols, of archetypal selves or cultural lore that we agree

upon in the transmission of these stories. There are heroes and villains, rescuers and rescued, proud and humble, magic and some plain old-fashioned luck. Stories can be mythic; they can be cautionary tales or both. They can be historic or aspirational and they can shapeshift over time. And stories are ways of reinforcing, challenging and making sense of it all. Edward Miller writes " Stories are our primary tools of learning and teaching, the repositories of our lore and legends. They bring order into our confusing world. Think about how many times a day you use stories to pass along data, insights, memories or common-sense advice."

If people learn from the stories they hear and teach through the stories they tell, maybe we should take a long look at ourselves and a long look at our stories. The stories told only in our imagination, can still create a personal reality. In Kye Flannery's sermon on stoicism, she used the example of a lost crayon. If the story you create is that someone has stolen your crayon, then you have also created a thief and a victim-yourself. There are other examples in historic narratives of oppression – women, the "weaker sex" prone to hysteria due to their biology. Black Americans were

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May's Theme is Story

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burdened with scientific racism, junk science theories that equated Blackness with inferior physical and intellectual attributes. Those are stories that allowed “good people” to subjugate women, and enslave men, women and children and for centuries defined a set of social norms.

Have we really rewritten those stories or just rebooted them for our current day? Racism hasn't gone away. If one watches the news, it seems the story of Black inferiority has been usurped by the story of Black criminality. The gender pay gap in the workplace replaces subjugation of women at home, although they still perform most caregiving roles – paid or not. The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced these narratives of difference, and “lesser than”, as women are forced to leave their employment when home and vocational obligations became unsustainable. Black Americans are vaccinated at much lower rates than White Americans.

Maybe we should take a long look at ourselves and a long look at our stories. I believe in the power of Story with a capital S to reinforce, shape or reshape our inner worlds. When we find another narrative, that narrative has the poten-

tial to change outer worlds. But new stories don't take hold readily. The symbols and lore that we agree upon and the narratives that we have adopted don't want to be displaced. Displacement is uncomfortable, and we want our stories to have happy endings without asking too much of us. If the story has been “no one innocent draws the attention of police”, perhaps we should be asking “why is police engagement with Black men ending in murder?” With the coda, “What does this demand of me?”

The one thing that you have that nobody else has is you. Your voice, your mind, your story, your vision. So write and draw and build and play and dance and live as only you can.

Neil Gaiman

Our congregation has a story too – ah I finally got there. The personal stories we make up, and the collective story we have agreed upon. There are stories of heroes and villains, rescuers and those rescued, the proud and humble, no magic, but a considerable amount of luck. That is all part of the lore and

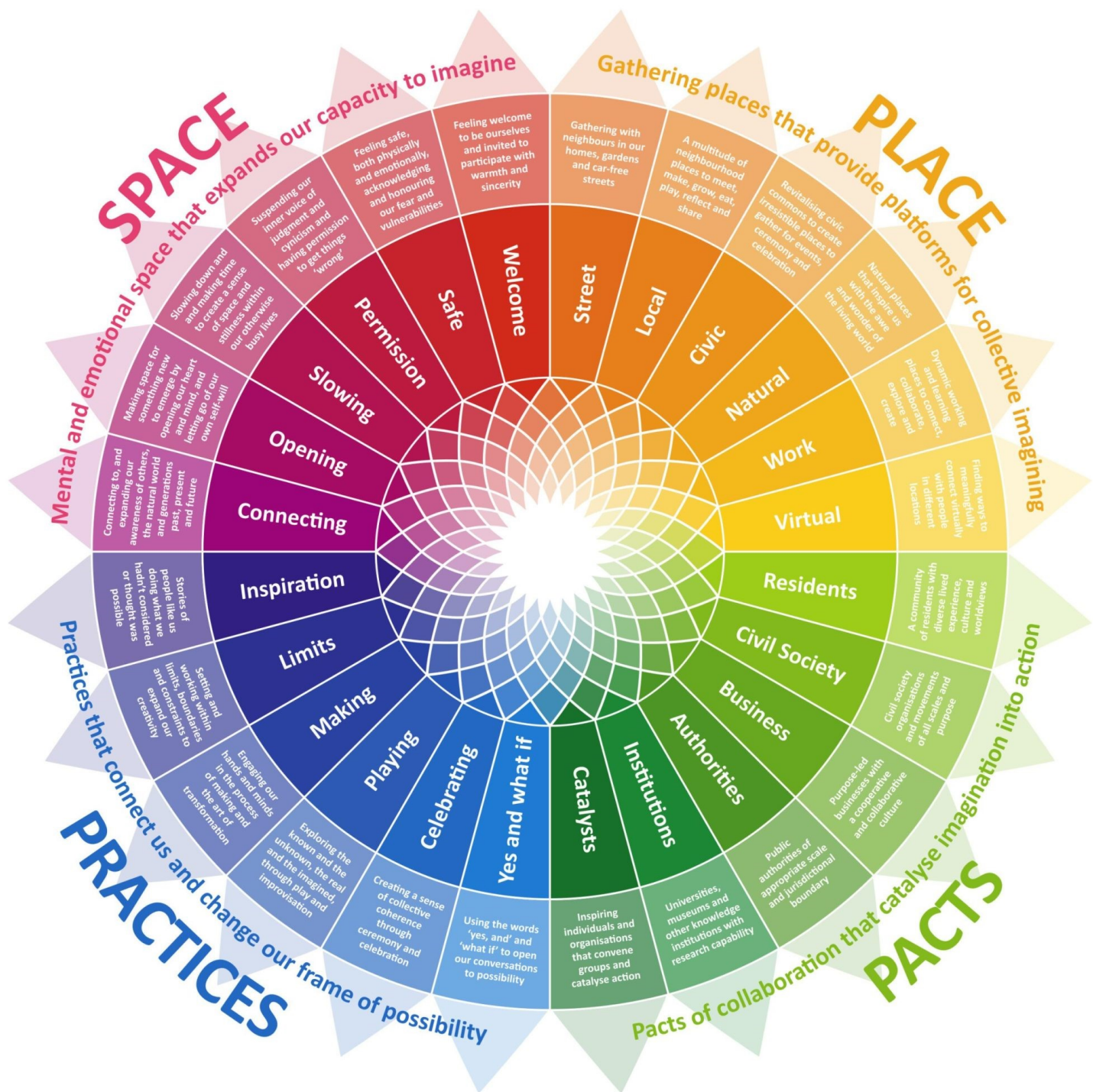
legend that has come from those who came before us. And maybe we should take a long look at ourselves and a long look at our stories. What story or parts of the story need to change? What should we be asking? What does our faith and this congregation need from us now? The new story may not be comfortable or fit in easily with our schedules, but unless you want another reboot with different actors, we will need to change, really change, deeply change, for our collective story to change.

I end as I began, with a nod to storytelling and the litany that I used to assure novice storytellers. Use your stories to create community. Sink into the stories of other people and see through their eyes. Open yourself to the inevitability of your mistakes and those of others. Make the story yours. Begin to change the story and begin to change yourself.



“Story” Pictures from [unsplash.com](#): [Forest Clearing](#) and [Storytelling](#)

Imagine What We Could Do



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"Imagination Sundial" by Rob Shorter: <https://www.robhopkins.net/2020/06/30/introducing-the-imagination-sundial/>
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 (If you're having trouble reading the outer ring, please use the zoom-in feature for the pdf)

If We Could Do What We Imagine

Excerpt from "Imagine What We Could Do If We Could Do What We Imagine" delivered by Sam Wilson on January 31st, 2021

Unfortunately, we are living in a time of imaginative decline, that can be contributed to a variety of factors related to modern society, but made specifically worse, even, in the past year. Long-term stress, rises in trauma, anxiety and depression, all of these things are literally killing cells in our hippocampuses as we endure this pandemic and time of great social upheaval, which in turn directly causes the deterioration of our memories and abilities to be creative. This is scientific fact.

Luckily, however, we also know that there are conditions that help to cultivate the collective imagination. Recognizing the present need, some people actually created something last year that they call the "imagination sun-dial" as a tool to help nurture our collective capacity to imagine. The basic idea is that there are 4 key places in which we can focus: space, place, practices, and pacts. They call it a sun dial because there's a diagram with a circle with these 4 places as 4 quadrants in the circle. You can see the sundial on the previous page of this newsletter.

Space means how we feel, so creating welcoming and safe spaces; it

relates to the mind and soul of the individual.

Place is more like the mind and soul of the community, and is about creating places for connection, creation, collaboration, that are welcoming and inviting to diverse people. They talk about gathering places that provide platforms for collective imagining, and they mention how this can be local neighborhoods, or work places, or places in nature.

Practices, the 3rd quadrant, are defined as specific ways that we can intentionally try to exercise our imaginations, like we all did on Feb. 7th during the 1st reflection. Practices can also include story-telling, arts of all kinds, play, and also just asking really good "What If" questions.

The 4th quadrant on the sun dial is pacts, which is the one that is most often and easily neglected. This means when there is an agreement of many to come together to do something with their visions; often there is a specific organization or entity that acts as a catalyst to bring people together, that ensures that everyone is heard, and everyone has a role in translating their collective imaginations into action.

But what is one thing that this entire imagination sun-dial and project on imagination completely neglect to mention? Religion. And, I

might add here too that this is one thing that Lennon gets completely wrong too when he sings "no religion too" before imagining us all living life in peace. Shoutout to our Music Director John Kramer for first bringing this to my attention!

What's fascinating, and frustrating to me about this absence, is how we at the Winchester Unitarian Society are so perfectly equipped to do this work! It reminds me of how many times my friends use the word religion when they really mean conservative Christianity, which I am always quick to point out only serves to reinforce conservative Christian hegemony. But we - UUs and friends of Winchester Unitarian Society – we beautifully fit into this sun dial in so many ways! Their creation of spaces that are welcoming and safe resonate so closely with the ways we use covenant to create mental and emotional spaces to grow together, plus the ways we use spiritual practices to rejuvenate and clear our minds; they talk about how place is for the mind and soul of a community, and, hello (!), WUS is the perfect gathering place for this, and, there are so many activities that we're already doing that fall into their ideas for practices, too. Where I would argue that we fall a bit short, though, is pacts. Yes, we have a mission, but how often do we, as a whole, or

Imagine / Becoming

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even we, as our youth group WUSYG, or the Music Committee, or RE or Green Sanctuary, the Sanctuary Taskforce, any of these things, how often do we intentionally and proactively create detailed visions and pacts to help realize them? Many of us do this to some degree, but I would urge us to consider this concept and this toolkit to really push our collective imaginations and actions further. (Edited after preaching to add: kudos to our RE Visioning and Racial Justice teams for doing this work by creating and implementing a clear vision and visioning process this year!)

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lessons I am learning:

I am learning, in a way I haven't before, about the preciousness of life and our persistent intimacy with death.

I am learning how truly interdependent we are, in our local communities and with other people and beings around the world.

I am learning how much my well-being depends on connecting with other people. I am also learning the gift of my own company.

I am learning again that the people society often names as invisible – essential workers, teachers, our elders – are our bedrock.

I am learning that chaos can also create new opportunities and unexpected gifts for which I am grateful.

How I wish there were a Harriet Tubman for us in this time as we approach the other side. Short of such a guide, I am grateful we have each other, the many ways we are extending our hands across the distance to make it through. Thank you for the many ways we are helping each other along the path of *becoming*...



Photo by [Kane Reinholdtsen](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Virtual Open Mic
Thursday,
March 25, 2021
7:00 PM

Please join the Winchester Unitarian Society and Winchester Community Music School for another Virtual Open Mic - hosted by WUS Music Director John Kramer. This program was developed in conjunction with Winchester Together. See the [WUS website](#) for more details.

Watch the event live on the WCMS [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#) channels, and learn more about Winchester Together on [its new website](#) and on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

The Hymns We Sing—Music Sunday, March 28th

By John Kramer, Music Director

Did you know that every hymn has a name which refers specifically to the tune? These are usually found on the bottom right hand corner of the hymn page.

For Music Sunday this spring we will be taking a look at our practice of singing hymns. There are many different cultural and religious traditions that feed into our hymnals. To name just a few, they include German Lutheran hymns of the reformation, Jewish hymns, Shaker and Quaker hymns of the 19th century, and contemporary hymns both composed by living Unitarian Universalists and borrowed from the popular music tradition. What varied springs feed into the ocean of our hymnody?

It is our custom to have “questions for reflection” asked following the worship service, but I would like to take some liberty and ask these questions in advance. To be fair to this article, I will provide my own answers and I invite you to send me yours in advance of this service. You could easily send me an email at john.kramer@winchesteruu.org.

What was your first remembered experience of singing hymns?

I cannot remember the very first time I sang hymns but rather seem to remember always singing hymns with my family in church. This, not surprisingly, was my favorite part of the service. I grew up in the Lutheran tradition and remember our church singing hymns fairly robustly. We sang a minimum of three hymns along with the sung liturgy; we sang more hymns if it was a communion Sunday. It was also during the singing of hymns that I developed my love of harmony, and I would try out the tenor or the bass parts, especially as I grew older. I would look forward to the Sundays when we sat close to other families with good voices so that we could sing the hymns together.

Did you grow up with a hymn singing tradition?

This will be an interesting question for many of us I think. As alluded to above, I did grow up with the Lutheran tradition of singing hymns. Lutherans are quite proud of their hymn tradition as we claim J.S. Bach and other luminaries as contributors. The Lutheran hymnal has also absorbed hymns from other traditions, including many of the same varied traditions that feed into our hymnal.

What is your favorite hymn?

I have a couple, although really most hymns that I am singing or accompanying are my favorite hymn at that moment! However, I do love the tune *Finlandia* of which we have two versions in our hymnal, #318 *We Would Be One* and #159 *This Is My Song*. Did you know that every hymn has a name which refers specifically to the tune? These are usually found on the bottom right hand corner of the hymn page.

What hymns or songs should we consider adding to our hymnody?

Since I been Music Director here in Winchester we have grown our collective hymnody, most notably by purchasing the supplement *Singing the Journey*. We have also explored singing chants and the occasional popular song, and a few new hymns composed by living UU composers, myself included. I feel personally and professionally that we, as a group, should have a body of hymns that we can sing together and know well, and that it should be rooted in our collective histories but also living and growing.



Y'all Means All: an 8th UU Principle

Excerpts from "Y'all Means All: an 8th UU Principle" delivered by Rev. Kye Flannery on February 7th, 2021

The idea of an 8th principle is that we hold ourselves to what we believe. How do we do that? I feel like two images and phrases come to mind for me around this, and one of them is this great rainbow Texas flag/sticker that's come out recently that says, "Y'all means all." And the second thing that springs up for me is this Rilke quote: "to love is good, love being difficult."

When I think about our nation and our denomination, and I think about our 1st Principle: the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Has y'all always meant all? When I think of that, I think of "Standing on the Side of Love." The amazing campaign name that's on many shirts that we have, and that accompanied us into Phoenix in 2012, standing up to the sheriff there, and doing this justice work with immigrant rights organizations and prisoners' rights organizations. This is a sheriff who put detained immigrants in tents and dressed detained men in pink because pink is the color of weakness. It was a beautiful strong moment for UUs to show up there in these yellow shirts that said "Standing on the Side of Love." and people getting arrested doing civil disobedience, standing up together in solidarity with the folks who in

their neighborhood had been doing this work for a long time and needed allies.

But then a couple years later, we thought about the word "standing." And we realized that even when we thought we meant *all*, that that word *standing*, which felt so proud, now was recognized to have overtones that centered a certain kind

8th principle: We the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote journeying towards spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.

of mobility. It was a t-shirt that a person in a wheelchair couldn't wear in the same way that I could wear. And over time that campaign became renamed "Side with Love." So that's...an example of how we think we have the *all*, and then we find that there's more. There's more all; there's a bigger all.

So, about living our principles with integrity...what does that journey look like? I just want to name that at Winchester, I have been honored to see how some of that work is taking place right now. So, here in this congregation, it doesn't only happen by taking a microphone; it happens through meeting agendas and shared to-do lists. It happens from the racial justice team, who've been going to different committee meetings at WUS, and asking questions like "What was the first time that you were aware of your own race and that you would be treated differently because of it?" "How does race matter and how could it work matter in the work of this committee and this congregation?" These good, deep, sort of meaty questions, hard questions, and brave questions to ask. And remember "to love is good, love being difficult."

The racial justice team has offered this vision statement to the Standing Committee: "We proclaim social justice and racial equity as a natural outgrowth of our UU values. We envision this goal as being integrated into everything we do: our spiritual growth, our worship services, our committee work, our discussions, our decisions, internal and public actions. We promise an an-

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Y'all Means All: an 8th UU Principle

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nual review process to assess and adjust our efforts on this journey.” That is 8th principle work in action.

Several years ago, many members of the racial justice team actually gathered others in the greater Boston area into a Network for Social Justice, and also, in 2019, convened a group of local racial justice groups from other congregations, to figure out their next steps, to hold one another accountable, to share resources, and to share ideas. Thanks to these loving hearts, and these 8th principle-hearted folks who have their feet on the ground with us. In April 2018, you all did this beautiful thing of raising these flags. And there was backlash, and those flags were violated. And the Black Lives Matter flag was taken down, but that journey, that public witness, extended into stores where people agreed that they would put rainbows and Black Lives Matter stickers. It included, in 2020, the town of Winchester actually raising an LGBTQIA plus flag and a Black Lives Matter flag on June 10, heralding more conversations to come in, in this community. “To love is good, love being difficult.”

This work has been happening, and I just want to name that too, that that's like a 7th principle thing: respect the interdependent web. You

all are affecting your interdependent web. And that's beautiful. That's amazing work. There are also these “Widening the Circle” sessions that are coming from the racial justice planning team, around visioning and dreaming and helping to understand, in the mechanics of it, how do we dismantle pieces that don't honor all lives, that don't honor Black lives, where we haven't seen clearly who the all is in the all...

Winchester is awakened, I would say, to the 8th principle, through conversations and coalition building and kindness and self-examining and relationships and phone calls to explain “this is what I really meant in my email,” openness to one another's agenda, and taking time to attend book discussion groups...



So has y'all meant all? Nope. Some have been too vulnerable, and some not vulnerable enough. Those who have suffered abuse, those who have not been able to be up-front about their needs. We have not asked for, or offered, the vulnerability needed for true acceptance. We have not always chal-

lenged one another. We've not always accepted a challenge when it's given.

Has the inherent worth and dignity of all people been guarded and included as part of our liberal faith? No, it has not. The question the 8th principle asks us to sit with is the same pressing and haunting question that Langston Hughes sat with in 1951 as Black vets came home from World War Two, only to find themselves back in second class status. Trying to purchase homes in redlined neighborhoods. “What happens to a dream deferred, does it dry up like a raisin in the sun, or fester like a sore and then run. Does it stink like rotten meat, or crust, and sugar over like a syrupy sweet. Maybe it just sags like a heavy load, or does it explode?”

It is time to stop deferring the dream of beloved community. We have done the work of loving and nurturing the dream, and we continue to - I believe to the best of our ability - and we'll try again tomorrow. So, this is not the last time... that Winchester will talk about this topic. We have leaders who are helping us to lean into this, so let's support their leadership and their courage. So we close with “to be continued.” May it be so. Amen.



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The Rev. Charles Reinhardt,
Minister Emeritus

The Pastoral Care Associates invite you to the next **Coffee/Tea and bagel gathering on Tuesday, March 16th at 9:30 AM.** With weather and covid numbers keeping us more isolated again, let's connect virtually. Dropping in and out is fine - we'll be there! Join us via the main link, <https://tinyurl.com/WUSworship>.