

"A Faith That Moves Us Now"

"The purpose of the church is to heal the consequences of lovelessness and injustice in the hearts and souls of our members so they might heal the community and together heal the world." ~ Nancy Bowen

READING

"Saving Unitarian Universalism" ~ John T. Crestwell, Jr. [page 56, *Voices from the Margins, An Anthology of Meditations*, edited by Jacqui James and Mark D. Morrison-Reed. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2012]

The thing that will save our faith, and that will allow us to become better lovers, fathers, mothers, daughters, sons, and friends, is building relationships – learning more about each other – seeing God in all people, places, and things. It's rooted in experience. The more we learn and grow with liberal minds and hearts, the more we see the Spirit emanating. The more we learn about our common destiny, the more we see that we all come from the same source; that we are all capable of good; that "God don't make no junk"; that the world we have is the world we've collectively created through our thoughts, words, and deeds. And when we see things differently, we can start doing things differently.

READING

"Love Abundant" ~ Alicia Forde
[page 62, *Voices from the Margins, An Anthology of Meditations*, edited by Jacqui James and Mark D. Morrison-Reed. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2012]

I lift my eyes up to the hills
from where will my help come?
My help comes from Love abundant.
my help comes from the hills
my help—my help, it comes from
ancient Mothers whose hearts beat in mine.
It comes from the trees that sway and the breeze that sways them . . .
my help comes from all that was and is and will ever be . . .
I lift my eyes . . . hushed by the soothing touch of waves
caressing wounded shores

wounded souls
I lift my eyes . . . to the horizon bathed by
the hum of mothers and mothers' mothers
cradling—gently rocking
I lift my voice—call of the sea trees sister moon mother earth
my soul weeping—a symphony of life overflowing
I give myself
I too hum through every pore
with every breath
I give myself—
an extension
of all that is, was, and ever will be.

SERMON

Waiting

Step into the center
 come in from the margins
I will hold you here.

Don't look back
 or around
feel my arms
 the water is rising.
I will hold you
as you tremble.
I will warm you.

Don't look out
 or away
life is in here
 between you and me.

In this tiny space,
where I end and you begin
 hope lives.

In this precious tiny space
no words need be whispered

to tell us we are one.

You and I
we make the circle
if we choose to.

Come
step in
I am waiting for you.

~ Marta Valentin

Come step in I am waiting for you.

Words from UU minister, Marta Valentin. Marta expresses her faith through poetry and worship. She practices embodied worship – an experience unfamiliar to many Northern New Englanders who are content to sit quietly in pews and mostly observe and think about the Sunday service. Impossible with Marta. She brings her whole self – mind, spirit and body. She brings her New England sensibility and she brings her Puerto Rican identity and culture.

To worship with Marta is different. The first time I experienced Marta leading worship, I was uncomfortable. She brought out of her gathered community a visceral response to the worship that I was neither expecting nor ready to embrace. I was awkward and, frankly, embarrassed. But, I kept coming back each morning of our week together. By midweek I was loving our moving and breathing and sweating and laughing and nerve tingling worship. Now, I love it when I am with her – not nearly often enough.

Marta is UU through and through. And those of us stuck in ways of faith that are white and 19th century, maybe early 20th century, have great difficulty providing a warm and honest welcome. She and other UUs of color have suffered in their attempts to both “fit in” and be authentic to their true selves. Our dominant culture has made it very hard for new people and new voices and new ways of being Unitarian Universalist. But, we’re beginning to get better. What we need is a faith that moves us NOW. Now in 2018 and in 2020 and for the next generation of folk who come to our life saving faith.

We long to be able to say, as Marta says, honestly and enthusiastically, “Come, step in, I am waiting for you.”

Two weeks ago, I began this two-part sermon by reminding us that since its earliest days in The United States, our Unitarian Universalist faith has been characterized by its ability and

willingness to move. We do not remain still in our faith, we move. We move toward love and justice. We move in service and community. It was a look backward at where we've been and how we got here. We heard the voices of some of our tradition's strongest heroes. James Luther Adams. Vincent Silliman. Lewis Fisher. Three prominent men who gave vision, shape and language to Unitarian Universalism.

Now, in the 21st century, it is our time to see the faces and hear the voices of people of color and faithful UUs from other marginalized groups and identities. It is time to embrace the full range of Unitarian Universalists whose vision and language will shape our faith and move us boldly into the future. It is time for us, predominantly white people of privilege, to follow as well as lead.

In our songs and readings today, we hear the voices of contemporary Unitarian Universalists.

Opening words – Viola Abbitt

Viola Abbitt is a candidate for the Unitarian Universalist ministry and a seminarian at Meadville Lombard Theological School. She is currently the ministerial intern at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Greater Springfield in Massachusetts, and a board member at Unirondack, a Unitarian Universalist camp and conference center in upstate New York.



Chalice Lighting – Adrian Graham



Adrian L. H. Graham has been a Unitarian Universalist since 1999 and a church lay-leader since 2003. He has served as a Trustee and Officer of the First Unitarian Church of Baltimore and as a member of several congregational committees, including a Ministerial Internship Committee, Ministerial Search Committee, and Committee on Ministry. Considering himself a "Uvangelist," he has been Director of Communications & Membership at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Rockville since 2016.

Readings from John Crestwell, Jr. and Alicia Forde

Rev. John T. Crestwell, Jr. is the Associate Minister at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis and founder of AWAKE Ministries where he sought and successfully broadens the emotional, racial, and intercultural competencies of children and adults through contemporary worship, music, mentoring, life coaching, and community service.





The Reverend Alicia Roxanne Forde serves with the Unitarian Universalist Association as the Professional Development Director, Ministries and Faith Development. She is a graduate of The Iliff School of Theology and currently lives in Longmont, Colorado. Alicia was born and spent her formative years in Trinidad and Tobago. She identifies as an African descent queer, cis-gender female with deep roots in Tobago and will readily admit that there is much about her current identity that reflects her 20 plus years of living in the United States. Alicia is a certified Spiritual Director and has a strong interest in health and wellness. When she's not hiking, you can find her reading, drinking tea, or podcast-walking.

Words of Mediation – Eric Cherry

Rev. Eric Cherry has been the Director of the UUA's International Office since August 2007. In this position, Eric manages the UUA's relationships with U/U and interfaith partners around the world, provides resources for congregational international engagement, and supervises the staff of the UU Holdeen India Program and UU United Nations Office. Prior to accepting this position Eric served for 12 years as a parish minister with UU congregations in Burlington, Iowa and Massachusetts. Eric has long been involved in the UU Partner Church movement, serving as the English Teacher for Unitarian Seminarians in Kolozsvár, Transylvania in 1998.



Eric is a life-long UU, and a graduate of Earlham College (BA) and Meadville/Lombard Theological School (M.Div). He and his wife, Linda, make their home in Mansfield, Massachusetts.

Rev. Cherry recently accepted a call to parish ministry in New Jersey.

Closing Words from Jean M. Rowe – Minister Emerita Neshoba Unitarian Universalist Church in Cordova, TN

Words of our faith – Susan Frederick Gray and Marta Valentin



The Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray is the ninth president of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). She was elected in June 2017 to a six-year term.

She has served as lead minister of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix since 2008. She previously served as minister of First Unitarian Universalist Church of Youngstown, Ohio, where she was a leader in congregation-based community organizing efforts, and served as intern at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville, Tennessee. After leading the UU response to Arizona's anti-immigrant laws in 2010, she became lead organizer for the Arizona Immigration Ministry and a key organizer of the 2012 Justice General Assembly. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Harvard Divinity School. She lives with her husband, the Rev. Brian Frederick-Gray, and their nine-year-old son, Henry.

Rev. Marta I. Valentín is a minister in a shared ministry with the Unitarian Universalist Church of Medford, MA. Her former shared ministries were with the First Church Unitarian in Littleton, MA, and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, VA. Her first settled shared ministry was at First Unitarian Universalist Church in New Orleans where she arrived two weeks before Hurricane Katrina. She also brings experience from a number of other Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) wide positions: the New England Regional Staff, the UUA's former staff group, Identity-based Ministries, Public Information Office and Beacon Press. She has shared her gifts as well with the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association's (UUMA) CENTER continuing education team. She is a published poet and percussionist.



These leaders are our future. They are moving with a 21st century faith that says all are welcome here – ALL ARE WELCOME HERE.

We will not ask nor will we permit people of various cultural, racial, sexual and ability identities to adapt to or assimilate into a white dominant UU culture of a past era. Friends, hear this: We Have Moved. We Are Still Moving. The circle of our faith is expanding – not from the center point, but from those at the margin pushing and pulling to make room for all who seek an entry and a fully recognized place in our beautiful liberal religious faith.

A faith that moves us now Our UUA President is Susan Frederick-Gray. Her public witness for justice and inclusion is tremendous. Her love for our faith is deep. Her devotion to all our congregations and all UUs everywhere around the world is unwavering. She does not look back, she looks forward and she is always moving.

Rev. Frederick-Gray delivered the sermon for the Sunday morning worship at our General Assemble the end of June.

She said:

As a people—a people of faith—that say we are committed to justice, compassion, and equity. As a faith that says we are committed to the inherent worth and dignity of all people. As a faith that says we are committed to respect for the interdependent web of all life—we have a critical role to play in this time.

Two things that are absolutely clear.

#1—This is no time for a casual commitment to your faith, your community, and your values, and

#2—this is no time to go it alone or to think we are in this alone.

This is no time for a casual faith. As Unitarian Universalists, we are first and foremost religious communities, religious communities that practice love as our

foundation—and we are living in times of heartbreak, violence, struggle, and pain. In this time, we need communities that remind us of our humanity in this very inhumane time.

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Now is the time to build stronger relationships across our faith deeper partnerships and commitment with those most impacted, on the frontlines of campaigns for liberation.

Theologically, our Universalism tells us that no one is outside the circle of love. However, we must understand that in our lives, in the context of oppression and discrimination, that the circle has never been drawn wider from the center. It has always grown wider because of the vision, leadership and organizing of people living on the margins who truly understand the limits and costs of oppressive policies—and what liberation means.

Her words, backed up again and again by her actions, move me deeply. I may not always be among those who risk their freedom and sometimes their lives for justice and equality. You may not always be among them. We are not, as she says, off the hook for the demands of our faith.

The question for us is this:

If we are not there, on the front line, then where are we and who are we following?

When I see our young leaders I am encouraged – and homestly, a bit scared. They are full of life and idealism and commitment.

They are colorful and bold and articulate and they do not let us off the hook just because we are older and whiter and have seen more of life and its complications and complexities. Their ways are not necessarily my ways and I must relax and try to see the world through their eyes and trust their experiences.

Their words are demanding and inviting; they are uncompromising where there is injustice; they embody love for all living beings; they are poetic and fierce; they are honest and require that their listeners be honest too, even when it is hard and uncomfortable. And they move me.

Rev. John Crestwell says that when we see things differently we can begin to do things differently – and that will be how we save Unitarian Universalism.

I do think he's on to something there.

Rev, Marta Valentin says:
You and I
 we make the circle
if we choose to.

Come
 step in
I am waiting for you.

She too is on to something, something that may move us to a deeper and more relevant faith; a faith that is rich and flexible and honest and demanding and sustainable and loving. It is a faith worthy of our devotion.

This faith of ours is precious. We need it for our own salvation in this life. We need to share it with as many as would find a home here. We will be changed. We will move. We will grow. We will live and breathe – together.

At the General Assembly worship last month, Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray offered these words as the Call to Worship. I want to offer them as a conclusion and a charge to us as we embrace a faith that moves us toward a better tomorrow – for ourselves and for all our relations.

My dear Spiritual Companions, may our faith be moved by all those around us of every color and culture and sexual identity and first language and physical ability and religious practice. May our lives be richer and happier for all we bring to each other.

Blessed Be. I Love You. Amen.