



CANADIAN  
UNITARIAN  
COUNCIL

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DU CANADA

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## RESOURCES FOR SHARING OUR FAITH 2017

Sharing Our Faith is a program of the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC), and it encourages greater associational awareness in our congregations, the fostering of relationships, and a sense of community and connection among and between our member congregations and communities.

Each year, the CUC encourages all congregations to hold a Sharing Our Faith service, and to take up a special collection. The collection is administered by the CUC and given directly back in the form of grants to congregations applying for projects they may otherwise not afford to undertake, and which enhance ministry, growth and/or outreach for that congregation and for the Unitarian and Universalist movement


The 2017 Sharing Our Faith package focuses on love and justice. We, as Canadian Unitarian Universalists, envision ***a world in which our interdependence calls us to love and justice.*** This vision for Canadian Unitarian Universalism was affirmed at the CUC Annual General Meeting in May, 2016. Arising from the foundational theology of our seventh principle, “respect for the interdependent web of all existence”, this vision asks us to live this principle through actions of love and justice.

We are beginning to learn to live interdependently, to care for water and air as essential to life, to be inclusive of all kinds of people, to be aware of how each action we take ripples out into the world. Embodying the experience of connection may take a lifetime to learn, to truly live in the radical interconnectivity of all that is.

As we live from an ethic of interdependence, we hear the call of love and justice. The world needs – now more than ever – human societies based on loving connection not hate and division. Seeking justice for all people helps grow a loving, sustainable system.

This packet was created by the Rev. Fiona Heath, former CUC Board member and Chair of the Vision Task Force. It is supported by material from Canadian UU ministers and individual Unitarians.

This package is offered for use by congregations as they plan their Sharing Our Faith services. It is the hope that as congregations create their worship service, they will remember others are using the same resource package and that the connections and relationships between congregations and communities will be strengthened.

Where a Canadian Unitarian Council maple leaf chalice symbol  is displayed after the name of a writer, it indicates that he or she is a Canadian or has served a Canadian congregation as their minister.

If you have any questions about this package, the program, or would like to apply for a Sharing Our Faith grant, please contact us at [sharing-our-faith@cuc.ca](mailto:sharing-our-faith@cuc.ca).

We hope this collection will be a valuable aid in preparing your Sharing Our Faith service.



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## Suggested Hymns

#51 Lady of the Seasons' Laughter  
#168 One More Step  
#298 Wake, Now, My Senses

#1017 Building a New Way  
# 1029 Love Knocks and Waits for Us to Hear  
#1064 Blue Boat Home  
#1074 Turn the World Around

## Inspirational Quotes

“We are called to *embody* interdependence, to give our principles substance through our actions and the physical world in which we act.”

*Keith Wilkinson, CUC Board of Trustees*



“Look more deeply, and you will see yourself as multitudes, penetrating everywhere, interbeing with everyone and everything.”

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

“We can either emphasize those aspects of our traditions, religious or secular, that speak of hatred, exclusion, and suspicion or work with those that stress the interdependence and equality of all human beings. The choice is yours.”

*Karen Armstrong, Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*



## Selections for Chalice Lighting Words

### 1) *Liz James, Unitarian Congregation of Saskatoon*



We begin our service this morning the way most Unitarian services begin  
With the lighting of a chalice

Like so many aspects of our religious community  
The candle that sits in this cup has been tended with care

Someone researched the choice of candles we buy  
Balancing cost with environmental impact, and aesthetics  
Someone orders these candles regularly  
Someone tested our chalice candle this morning, to be sure it would light

Someone lit the candle beside it, and set the taper in place,  
They did this because at some point  
It was noticed that the ritual of moving a flame by taper is more beautiful than just striking a  
match.

Of course, we haven't forgotten the matches.  
Someone has made sure there are spare matches in the podium  
Just in case something goes wrong  
And also, just in case  
Someone has even set a fire extinguisher nearby

And so we see that a chalice light does not come from one person's hand  
Any more than an oak tree comes just from the seed that's planted

A flame, a seed, or a person, carries with them a potential  
that must meet with a good home to thrive  
This, then, flame does not begin just in this moment

This morning, we have prepared this candle, this space and ourselves  
And, with a trust and a spirit of exploration,  
We begin



3) *Rev. Debra Faulk, Unitarian Congregation of Calgary*



As we light this chalice may it remind us of the light we each are,  
That love and justice call us  
To be agent of transformation,  
envisioning a world with our interdependence shaping all actions and decisions,  
May we strive to be deeply connected, radically inclusive and actively engaged,  
while we remain spiritually grounded and theologically alive.

4) *Rev. Lynn Harrison, First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto*



Committed to respond to the call of a wounded world...  
We join together this day with loving hearts, hands and minds.  
Embracing the interconnected web of water, air and earth...

We light a fire of sustaining hope, ever bright with love and justice.

May we bring forth this day new wisdom, strength and courage  
To create a new world not of wealth, but well-being.  
A world of new peace and abundance for all.

As we give thanks for this earth, our shared and singular home,  
May we dedicate ourselves to its ongoing care.

Rising to the calls deep within us, and all around us...  
May we respond today and always with courage and with love.



## Selections for Opening Words/Call to Worship

### 1) *Rev. Shawn Newton, First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto*



Let us remember that there is a transformative power  
at the centre of this faith that works on us over the long haul—  
when we let it, and sometimes even when we resist—  
wearing down our prejudices,  
challenging our assumptions,  
enlarging our hearts and  
widening our capacity for wonder and awe  
at the great gift of life we find in this present, precious moment.

In this moment, let us worship together.

### 2) *Rev. Fiona Heath, Unitarian Congregation in Mississauga*



In the face of ecological decline we journey together.  
In the face of social upheaval we journey together.  
In the face of growing uncertainty we turn towards one another.

As we seek healing for the planet we journey together.  
As we seek healthy social systems we journey together.  
As we seek new ways of being we reach out to one another.

As the earth spins around the sun we sit together.  
As time moves ever onward we dance together.  
As the universe unfolds into new patterns we celebrate life.

Come, let us celebrate on this day!

### 3) *Margaret Keip (adapted), UUA Worship Web*

As surely as we belong to the universe  
we belong together.

We join here to transcend the isolated self,  
To reconnect,  
To know ourselves to be at home,  
Here on earth, under the stars,



Part of the mystery,  
Linked with all beings.

As surely as we belong to the universe,  
we belong together.

## Selections for Stories for All Ages

### 1. *“The Great Kapok Tree” by Lynne Cherry*

“One day, a man exhausts himself trying to chop down a giant kapok tree. While he sleeps, the forest’s residents, including a child from the Yanomamo tribe, whisper in his ear about the importance of trees and how “all living things depend on one another” . . . and it works.”

### 2. *“Earth Mother” by Ellen Jackson*

“The circle of life turns in unexpected ways. Earth Mother awakes with the dawn. As she walks the land, swims the seas, and climbs the mountains, nurturing all of creation, she comes across Man, Frog, and Mosquito. They each give her thanks for nature’s bounty, yet can’t help but give her advice about making their lives better. Everybody’s got an opinion, it seems, and Earth Mother is amused when it becomes clear that the circle of life is not without a healthy dose of cosmic humor.”

## Selections for Meditation

### 1) *Barbara Hamilton-Holway, UUA Worship Web*

Let there be a quiet time among us.

Spirit of life, in us and around us, here is our chance—once again—to live like we wish the world would live. May we find within ourselves the courage to be who we are. May we know when it is time to listen and when it is time to speak. May we trust ourselves to be the ones to find the words that need to be said or to do what needs to be done. May we trust one another and know there are many ways to go through life. May we know that though we cannot change some of what life gives to us, we can choose how we deal with what we are given.

We are coming into our power, and together we can make possible justice and love.

We are all connected; we depend upon one another more than we know. We are one body.

So be it. Blessed be. Amen.



## 2) *Communion Circle, Rev. Mark Belletini, UUA Worship Web*

The earth.  
One planet.  
Round, global,  
so that when you trace its shape  
with your finger,  
you end up where you started. It's one. It's whole.  
All the dotted lines we draw on our maps  
of this globe are just that, dotted lines.  
They smear easily.  
Oceans can be crossed.  
Even the desert can be crossed.  
The grain that grows on one side of the border  
tastes just as good as the grain on the other side.  
Moreover, bread made from rice is just as nourishing  
to body and spirit as bread made from corn,  
or spelt or teff or wheat or barley.  
There is no superior land, no chosen site,  
no divine destiny falling on any one nation  
who draws those dotted lines just so.  
There is only one earth we all share,  
we, the living, with all else that lives  
and does not live.  
Everything,  
everything, for good or ill,  
is part of the shared whole:  
sky, earth, song, words and now, this silence.

## 3) *Visualization Exercise, Thich Nhat Hanh*

Get comfortable on your chair. Settle into your body. Close your eyes and breath deeply.

Breathe out three times.  
See yourself holding a round orange tangerine that slowly changes into a blossom on a tangerine tree.  
Sense how the tree is bathed in the light of the golden sun and then covered with soft cool rain.  
Notice how the blossom becomes a small green fruit that grows into the orange tangerine.  
See and smell the tangerine in your hand.





Breathe out one time.

Imagine yourself peeling the tangerine and eating a piece of it, knowing that as you do so, you are being part of the sun, the rain, the tree, and all of the Creation.

Take one last deep breath and then open your eyes.

## Selections for Readings

### 1) Love & Justice

*Rev. Naomi King (adapted)*

This is a time of trial.

But if we are among the love people, the folk called to be part of changing the world without hate, we have much work, much spiritual, legal, practical, and relational work to do.

Love is not about drawing in and drawing smaller circles. That does not keep hate out or turn hate away. Love asks us to be bold and risky and vulnerable and faithful to these amazing promises we have made.

We're still in this together. Our neighbors are still everyone in the whole world, those neighbors we are called to love, including the ones that are angry and afraid or that we who have suffered violence from hatred have learned to fear.

How do we go forward? Same as before and also more: more organization, more effort, more faithful risk especially to create sanctuary and protect those most in danger. Love and Justice have been our calling in other times of hatred in the past, one that we often struggled to embrace because this is difficult and painful as well as astounding and beautiful work. Love and Justice were our calling in the middle of hate made manifest before this election. Love and Justice are our calling now.

Love unite us, guide us, strengthen us, encourage us for the way ahead.

Love hold us, comfort us, & help us risk making way & welcome for all in need.

Love challenge us each & every day to meet hate & challenge & change it.

Love carry us on & let us be your voice singing as we work for change.

Love carry us on & let us be your hands making a more generous world.

Love carry us on & let us be part of the way of healing & hope now & forward.



### 3) Responsive Reading

*Rev. Debra Faulk, Unitarian Congregation of Calgary*



All: As Canadian Unitarian Universalists, we envision a world in which our interdependence calls us to love and justice.

West: As Canadian Unitarian Universalists: Seven principles guide our choices, Six sources nourish our spirits, Five aspirations help us grow.

East: We aspire to be: **Deeply Connected** We strive to foster healthy relationships amongst and within UU communities, with the broader world and with all life.

West: **Radically Inclusive** We strive to create hospitable, diverse, multi-generational communities.

East: **Actively Engaged** We strive to work joyfully for a just and compassionate society, experimenting with new forms of community.

West: **Theologically Alive** We seek to be ever-evolving in our understanding, open to new knowledge.

East: **Spiritually Grounded** We seek transformation through personal spiritual experiences and shared ritual

All: Holding this in common we come together, committed to the growth, sustainability and nurture of this our liberal faith

### 4) Two-way Street

*Susan Ruttan, CUC board member, Unitarian Church of Edmonton*



A precious moment for me this year was bobbing for apples at a church Halloween party, with the mother of our Syrian refugee family, Ramza, bobbing right next to me. We were both hopeless at it, but laughing like crazy at the silliness of it all.

Supporting Ramza's family this past year has enriched the lives of those of us involved, while it has given the family a new, safe home. That's how interdependence works – it's a two-way street, giving and receiving, that leads to deeper relationships with people everywhere.

Interdependence is the heart of who we are as Canadian Unitarian Universalists. The word interdependence is the core of our new vision statement, and it takes us many places – to social justice, global crises, respect for the planet, and to the bonds between Canadian UUs. As our vision statement says, it leads us to commit ourselves to love and justice.



It's a word worth celebrating and pondering, but it's also a challenge. We have work to do to live up to this vision statement. Within our congregations, we must seek ways to build closer ties with one another, including newcomers. Beyond that, we need to connect with other Canadian congregations, sharing our support, ideas and love. And beyond that, of course, is a world that needs us.

## 5) Arms Wide Open

*Rev. Brian Keily, Unitarian Church of Edmonton*



It is a trying time for those who follow a liberal Unitarian faith. We who prefer the open hand of welcome to the closed fist of alienation are being challenged like never before.

There is so much violence in so many places around the world – Dallas, New Orleans, Baghdad, Nice, and countless other tear-stained places where the forces of hate and hurt are lashing out. It is such a test to keep our arms open when it might feel so much easier to bar the door and hide safely behind the walls.

But we must keep as open as we possibly can. Our first Principle reminds us that we affirm all people. Our Seventh Principle reminds us that we are part of an interdependent web, even when we hide behind walls. And those Principles remind us about justice and fairness and all those other compassionate practices that make liberal religion a force for positive change in the world.

Let us remind ourselves that the world is progressing in our direction despite these terrible setbacks. By every measurable standard, the world is a safer place in the 21st century than it was in the 20th. Let us hold true to our Principles and stay strong in our faith. Our deep understanding of our interdependence calls us to love and justice, to keep our arms wide open and hug the hurting world.

Amen.



## Selections for Sermons

### 1) “A Vision, from Sea to Sea”

*Rev. Shawn Newton, First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto  
21 August 2016*



It probably won't come as a surprise to hear me say  
that I wonder, from time to time, just what religion is for.

What is the purpose of religion?  
Why do people believe what they believe?

Why do people do certain things in the name of religion,  
while refraining from or denying themselves other things?

What inspires people to devote their energy  
and a portion of their resources to support and sustain it?

Why do people turn to religion to guide how they dress,  
what they eat, and whether or when they have sex?

Just what is religion for?  
Well, it is—and always has been—for many things.

Sometimes comforting,  
sometimes confusing,  
sometimes contradicting.

Religion is, I believe, inseparable from life itself.  
The human condition seems to cry out for it.  
I see it as our system for making meaning of the world around us.

Even those who deny being religious,  
almost always have some elements of their day-to-day life  
that end up looking an awful lot like religion.

That's even true here.

While some amongst us strongly resist the notion  
that Unitarianism is a religion, I respectfully beg to differ.



The etymology for the word religion comes from the Latin, *religare*.

It's similar to the word for ligament.

It means to bind back to.

It is like the connective tissue that binds bone to bone.

Religion is what binds us together.

It is what connects us—to each other, to the universe, to life itself.

The challenge, of course,  
is that there are so many ways we can be connected,  
some more helpful, and healthy, and life-giving than others.

What many people conjure when they think of religion  
is a typically rigid system of belief that tells people  
what to do and what not to do.

There's usually some holy book full of rules  
at the centre of things, though not always.  
Rules set up by or sent down from a distant deity.

And then there are teachers or holy men—  
and they're almost always men—  
who act as guides, or sometimes as enforcers.

For most of us, when we define religion,  
it involves the notion that to belong is to believe.  
To accept the rules and to be bound by them.

But, that's a very Western concept of religion.  
It's what a colleague of mine refers to as the "Protestant Lens,"  
which has shaped so much of our thinking since the Reformation.<sup>1</sup>

When we see religion from this perspective, we see books and beliefs.

Religion can be that, of course.  
But many other religions are about doing, or about being.  
Belief is often completely beside the point.  
Many don't have holy books, per se.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Brian Carwana, of Encounter World Religions, for this insight.



And if they do, they may only be read by a tiny number of people.

What usually matters is how people spend their days.

What matters is how they behave.

What matters is the ability to cultivate certain habits,  
to do certain things at an appointed time in a sanctioned way.

What matters maybe most of all is how religion helps people to explain the world around them—  
and to get through life's challenges.

To understand the meaning of our lives.

To assign some greater purpose  
to what it means to live and to die on this earth.

This summer I have wrestled with the question  
of what religion is for, more than I usually do.

I thought about it while I was in Columbus, Ohio, in June,  
attending the annual General Assembly  
of the Unitarian Universalist Association,  
where we spent a lot of time grappling with what role  
we are called to play in the Movement for Black Lives.  
Where we asked what action our religion asks of us.

I thought about it when I was in the Netherlands in July  
for the biennial gathering of  
the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists,  
which drew people from six continents  
seeking to understand what it is we hold in common  
under the banner of this faith.

Where we asked what our connections ask of us.

And I thought about what religion is for  
while I took part in an intensive tour, here in Toronto,  
of many of the religions that are part of the fabric of our city.

I did it through a program called Encounter World Religions—  
which is precisely what we did for seven straight days:  
we encountered world religions, right here at home,  
visiting Buddhist and Taoist and Hindu temples;  
worshipping with Sikhs in a gurdwara, Jews in a synagogue,



and Muslims in a mosque.

Taking part in pagan rituals with a coven,  
staring into the sacred fire of our local Zoroastrians,  
and meeting with Rastafarians to learn  
what their faith means to them beyond the stereotypes  
of simply getting stoned and listening to Bob Marley.  
(There's a lot more to it than that!)

I found this tour deeply moving,  
and I'll never look at our city in the same way.

I can't recommend this program highly enough.  
I know a few of you have been in it before.  
I feel it should be a required course for everyone who lives in Toronto.

So much of what the world needs right now  
is to be found in that one busy week,  
trekking on a school bus from one sacred site to another.

I learned more about different religions in that single week  
than I did in earning a degree in comparative religion from Harvard.  
If only I had known that so many years ago...!

The great take-away from the week was this:  
There are many ways to be religious.

There are many ways to understand what it means to be human,  
to wrestle with what it means to be alive,  
and be invited into the bittersweet bargain that is life on this planet.

That there is a need to behold the Other—  
those who come at life's questions from a different angle,  
with a holy curiosity and a commitment to compassion.

It's too often said that all religions teach essentially the same thing.  
This is not really true.

Almost all religions teach some version of The Golden Rule.  
But the purpose and the process behind each  
can be and often is quite different.



Now, sitting with the question of what religion is for invariably leads us to ask what our religion is for.

To ask what is our purpose.

To wonder what it is that we have to offer in the broader human effort at meaning making.

This is a question several of us have worked to answer over the last three years as part of our national body, the Canadian Unitarian Council.

In May, in Vancouver, the delegates from our congregation, joined by those from across the country, came together in a large meeting room to give voice to what we believe our religion is for.

It was actually the culmination of a three-year process that was sparked, I'm happy to say, by the Confluence Lecture I gave at our national gathering in Calgary in 2013.

In that address, I pointed to the many ways religion is rapidly changing.

The church structures—physical and figurative—that once dominated Canadian culture and seemed destined to endure forever have been greatly diminished from their former glory.

The historic, foundational faiths of this country—the Anglicans, Catholics, and United Church—are all in a serious to severe decline.

Increasingly, the religious landscape of Canada reflects the diversity of backgrounds that now define us.

For much of the past half-century, living into Trudeau's vision of a truly multicultural Canada, religious identity was largely a personal, private concern.





As the country became more secular,  
and moved away from the easy assumption  
that most everyone was some type of Christian,  
there seemed to be a tacit agreement  
to not really delve too deeply into religious questions.

People mostly kept their religion to themselves.  
Canada operated with a don't ask/don't tell policy  
that, by most accounts, helped to tame public discourse  
by smoothing away or even ignoring our differences.

But that agreement is being actively renegotiated today.

As Professor Paul Bramadat, from the University of Victoria, puts it,  
we're shifting now into a very different phase in our national life.

Religious differences matter more and more.

Where they used to be glossed over or ignored,  
they are now sometimes a source of open conflict,  
as we debate what it means to accommodate or tolerate religious differences.

The rhetoric over the niqab in the last federal election is a sign of this.

We only need to look to France and Germany this week  
to see how this is playing out in the uproar over so-called "birkinis,"  
a cross between a burka and a bikini,  
the new clothing choice of some Muslim women  
to ensure modesty at the beach.

Suffice it to say, the uproar is about much more  
than how much fabric is used in creating what these women wear.

It's about a society's capacity to deal with difference,  
to balance individual choice and collective impact.

It's about whether we can overcome our fear of what is foreign to us.

Whether we can see the Other  
without resorting to the often dangerous human inclination  
of othering those who are different by judging them to be



wrong, or “less than,” or evil.

It’s not always easy to resist this urge.  
But it’s of growing importance on this tiny planet of ours.

For much of our history, Unitarians have proudly championed  
freedom, reason, and tolerance in religion.

We’ve held that religious belief should be a matter of personal conscience.

We’ve held that religion should be rational—  
sometimes to the exclusion of any or all other ways of knowing.

And we’ve held that we must be accepting of differences,  
even when we vehemently disagree.

While all of this still holds true, we are also changing.

Much of the energy behind upholding freedom, reason, and tolerance  
concerns matters of belief.

We’ve very much been operating out of our Western Protestant Lens,  
when we’ve articulated what our religion is for.

The shift we’re undertaking now, though, is a turn  
toward seeing the world around us in a broader, more inclusive way—  
and toward understanding our place within it  
as calling us beyond heady questions of mere belief  
to tangible action to build a better world.

Hear again the new vision statement:

As Canadian Unitarian Universalists,  
we envision a world in which our interdependence  
calls us to love and justice.

The crux of this new vision is the recognition  
that our lives are bound up with all other life on this good green earth.

This is a bold theological statement of utmost importance.  
And frankly, it’s a turn away from the fierce individualism



that has at times dominated Unitarian discourse over the past two centuries.

It is an affirmation, in the deepest possible sense,  
that what touches the life of one of us, affects us all.

When we take that to be true,  
when we accept that as the central reality of our being,  
when we truly know this in our bones,  
we are called to a way of life that demands a great deal of us.

We are called to increase the sum total of love and justice on this earth—  
not simply in some lofty, theoretical sense for people half a world away,  
but in the very day-to-day moments of our lives:  
in our city, at our work, on our block, in our homes, and within our hearts.

As Canadian Unitarian Universalists,  
we envision a world in which our interdependence  
calls us to love and justice.

It sounds so simple. It's just one sentence.

But it's what our religion is for.

Trying to live into it—faithfully—will keep us busy for a long time to come.

In truth, it is the work of generations,  
each building upon the commitments of those who have gone before  
in the sacred hope that we might bend  
the long moral arc of the universe ever onward to justice.

To do this, our vision sets out our five aspirations.  
The intention to be:

Deeply Connected,  
Radically Inclusive,  
Actively Engaged,  
Theologically Alive,  
and Spiritually Grounded.

Each of these warrants a sermon on its own—  
and those will surely come in the fullness of time.



For now, a few words about each will have to suffice.

We aspire to be deeply connected—  
to our sense of what is sacred, to each other, and to our wider communities.

We aspire to be radically inclusive—  
welcoming all people, in the fullness of who they are,  
on this journey with us.

We aspire to be actively engaged—  
fully and heartily occupied with the work of love and justice before us.

We aspire to be theologically alive—  
awake and open to new and deeper understanding of life's meaning.

And we aspire to be spiritually grounded—  
firmly rooted in the sacred soil of life  
that we might be nourished and strengthened  
to take up our work in the world.

This summer, as part of my doctoral work,  
I took a course called “Models of Contextual Theology.”

I know. I know. It sounds absolutely riveting, right?

The reading was a pretty hard, dense slog.  
Our seminar discussions were at times far too theoretical for my tastes.

But the take-away was compelling, and it was this:  
All theology is contextual.

In other words—what we believe and what we do,  
all that we chalk up to religion  
and our effort to make meaning of our life—is local.

Do we walk our talk?  
Do we practice what we preach?

Do we live lives of integrity  
that demonstrate what our religion is for?



May the answer this day and every day be a resounding “yes!”

May we live into the high calling of this new vision.

May our lives bear the signs of a people striving,  
even when we stumble,  
to bring more love and more justice into this world.

May it be so.

May it be so.

Amen.

## 2) Tangled Webs,

*Rev. Fiona Heath, Unitarian Congregation of Mississauga*

*May, 2016*



My family and I once stayed on a farm in Washington State in a pretty little valley.

Each morning we would walk out to nearby meadow full of spider webs sparkling in the sun.

They were entrancing. The intricate webs were so delicate and so beautiful as they shimmered on the green shrubs.

The web, I think, is a fitting symbol of Unitarian Universalism.

We are not a hierarchy but a network of people and communities across the country and across the world.

We have arisen out of community and conversation for the last few hundred years.

Each strand tied to other strands, some extending into history to the brave heretics who believed differently and said so.

Some extending around the world, threads connecting us to Unitarians in Burundi, the Philippines, India, Europe.

Some of the strands connect each of us to one another.

Many of the strands connect us to the neighbourhoods and land around us.

We are held in this fragile, shimmering weaving of connection.

It is this image - the web of life - which led me to this spiritual tradition.

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One summer in university I had a job at a historic house on the shores of Lake Ontario. It was a quiet place that rarely had visitors. We did a lot of garden work to pass the time.

I was raking wood chips onto a path, standing barefoot in the back of a pick up truck, listening to music on the truck's radio. The sun was shining and there was a wind coming off the water. As I raked the pile down onto the ground, I lost track of myself.

One moment I was only me, the next I was everything. Time fell away, space grew, and I was the sky and the trees and the truck and the birds and even the wood chips. Then I was just me again.

The intense experience of being all life – the sheer wondrous immensity of life – has stayed with me.

It was the briefest of moments but it changed my understanding of the human relationship with nature.

I understood – deeply, completely - that I belong to the earth, that I am part of this harmonious whole. And it is amazing!  
Even though I am unaware most of the time, I am part of it all.

A couple of years later I went to York University for environmental studies, trying to find meaningful work that would allow me to honour that profound sense of connection.

It was easy at York to be aware – at least at intellectual level - of the inter-connected nature of all life.

As a student I had the time to think about my values, and no money to tempt me to abandon them.

I was with other people who cared as deeply as I did about connecting to the earth.

It was more difficult after I left the academic bubble.

Although in Waterloo I became part of a community of people who continued to experiment with new ways of living, daily living made it hard to honour my values.

It became harder to remember the wonder of connection.

And in seeking out a religious community to help me live my values, it was the seventh principle which brought me to Unitarian Universalism.

We affirm and promote the interdependent web of all life of which we are a part.



This principle told me the way of the chalice was the way I had been seeking.

I follow the light of the chalice because of the seventh principle.  
For me, living interdependently is the path forward for people and the planet.  
It is the path, the paradigm, the truth that we need now.

And it seems many Canadian UUs agree.  
The Canadian Unitarian Council has proclaimed a new vision for the future: we seek to create *a world in which our interdependence calls us to love and justice.*

In this statement, the CUC has acknowledged the foundation of Unitarian Universalism as interdependence.  
This is both an ecological truth and a theological truth.

We belong to the earth, we are part of an interconnected whole.  
I know this deep in my heart because of that summer's day.

As the Unitarian minister James Ishmael Ford says, "we are completely woven out of each other and the cosmos itself."

In the web of life, we are all part of the pattern.

As writer Donna Henes notes, "there is no such thing as opposing sides.  
There is only one side.  
Just us folks here, all just trying to live life as best we can.  
There is no us and them. There is only us.  
We – all of us who occupy this planet: organic and inorganic; living and not; past, present, and future – *are* the world. "

Trying to live this truth in our lives is the ultimate challenge.  
But the planet, the plants, the animals, the people are in desperate need of new ways of living.

The imperative of next decade will be learning how to live in connection, in respect with one another and the planet.

We need that Unitarian Universalist story – that we don't stand separate and in charge of nature, but neither are we insignificant specks of dust.  
Humankind are co-creators with trees and water and bugs.

We have changed the earth – for better and mostly for worse – through our choices. But we know the earth is resilient, we can help it return to function, we can help restore it.



We envision a world in which our interdependence calls us to love and justice.

We can be – must be - champions of interdependence.

The earth, the people, all creatures, need a better way of being.

We are called to love and justice because we know – deeply – that we live in the web of all life.

I'll repeat Donna Henes' words, "there is no such thing as opposing sides.

There is only one side.

Just us folks here, all just trying to live life as best we can.

There is no us and them. There is only us.

We – all of us who occupy this planet: organic and inorganic; living and not; past, present, and future – *are* the world. “

While “we are the world” is a cheesy charity song, it is also a profound truth. We are co-creators in the world, shaping the earth to our stories.

We can choose the world we want to live in.

And the world I want is one in which we live interdependently, humans and animals, with clean air and clean water, enough for all.

I don't want to sentimentalize nature and pretend we will live in the garden of eden if we learn to live interdependently.

My cute little kitten who purrs adorably on my shoulder also rips cute little mice to pieces.  
Nature includes death and destruction.

But we can choose a world where nature is to be respected, where there are magnificent creatures that have their own inherent worth. Where predators will kill prey but we can learn to co-exist. Where we take less so other creatures can have more habitat, more food.

Our interdependence calls us to love the world, to restore it to health, to create justice.

We can choose a world where we live within nature's limits.

We can choose a world that is not just about us.

I believe we have to, if we want our children's children's children to have a life worth living.

This is a tall order but we can start small.

As the saying goes, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.





Each of you here today has already taken the first steps, we are already a few kilometres down the road.

In this chalice community, where we have a bio-filter septic system, where we have banned bottled water, we are seeking that new way of being in the world.

And the path isn't always clear, we have to find our way through the asphalt and concrete and cars.

So we need one another. We need to reach out our hands to one another and find the trail together.

Augustin Fuentes worked at an orangutan research centre in Borneo many years ago, long before the days of GPS.

Augustin had gone out into the rain forest to find the maroon leaf monkey.

After hours of searching along the marked trails, he thought he spotted one deeper in the forest. He decided to risk going off the trail.

An hour later, no monkey in sight, he started looking for a trail back to camp using his compass. After another hour, night was falling and still hadn't found a trail. Augustin was getting a little nervous in the forest, off the trail, all alone, in the twilight.

Then he heard a rustling in the leaves and looked over and saw an orangutan. Her face was familiar – she was one of the orangutans being brought back to health at the centre.

The man and the orangutan looked at one another.  
She held out her hand and Augustin reached out and took it.  
Hand clasped in hand, she led him back home.

Hand in hand, we can find the way.  
When we remember “There is no us and them. There is only us.  
Just us folks here, all just trying to live life as best we can.”

Hand in hand, we can find the way.

Our interdependence calls us to love and justice.  
May we remember our deep connections to all life.  
May we work for a society based in love and shaped by justice.

May we find the way, hand in hand.  
So Say We All!



## Words for the Offering

Today, our congregation is marking Sharing Our Faith Sunday.

Sharing Our Faith is a program of the Canadian Unitarian Council.

It encourages greater associational awareness in our congregations, the fostering of relationships, and a sense of community and connection among and between our member congregations and communities.

During Sharing Our Faith services, the collection taken is in support of the Sharing Our Faith fund. This fund consists of monies collected by congregations at special Sharing Our Faith services during the year and contributions from a Foundation Fund administered by the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto. These funds are sent to the CUC to be allocated in the form of grants to congregations applying for projects they may otherwise not afford to undertake, but which enhance ministry, growth and/or outreach for that congregation and for the Unitarian and Universalist movement in Canada.

Since 2001, through the generosity of our congregations and members, the Sharing Our Faith program has awarded over \$181,000 to congregations. Initiatives include:

- Support for part-time professional ministry
- Communication, publicity and increasing visibility
- Religious education and music programs
- Youth programs
- Commissioning of music for "Missa Brevis Pro Serveto, a mass for UUs"

Today's collection is in support of the Sharing Our Faith fund.

Let your giving this morning be a true expression of spiritual generosity.

After:

Our relationship with the larger Canadian Unitarian Universalist movement is a gift. Our generous support today is an expression of our gratitude for the larger community and our hope that together we can serve the needs of our congregations, our communities, our country and our world.



## Selections for Closing Words

### 1) *Starhawk, from This Earth Path (p.32)*

“When a system is whole and healthy, when it is based on relationships of interdependence and cooperation that further resilience, diversity, abundance, sustainability, creativity and freedom, it exhibits what humans call ‘justice’.”

May our lives be dedicated to healthy systems of interdependence, love and justice.  
May it be so.

### 3) *Rev. Fiona Heath*

Go out into your week knowing you are connected to all that you meet. Go and love the world. Go and seek justice for all beings.  
Blessings on us all.



### 4) *Jean Shinoda Bolen*

“I have often felt myself to be a point of light, connected to everyone I have ever loved or mattered to, each also being a point of light, in turn connected to those they love, so that somehow we are all part of a vast web of twinkling lights. ...  
It feels as if everyone who acts compassionately, works to raise this consciousness, to save the planet, to make a difference in some significant way is linked to everyone else who also does.”

Let our lights be linked, let our lights shine brightly in the days to come. Go in peace.

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Thank you for holding a Sharing Our Faith Sunday, and for contributing to the growth of our national Unitarian Universalist community.  
Please send funds in the form of a single cheque made out to **Canadian Unitarian Council** and marked “*Sharing Our Faith.*”  
For any members wishing a tax receipt,  
please include their names and the amount donated.

Further information can be obtained by e-mailing [sharing-our-faith@cuc.ca](mailto:sharing-our-faith@cuc.ca),  
by referring to the [Sharing Our Faith](#) section of the [CUC website](#),  
or by calling the CUC office at 1-888-568-5723.