

Harvest Season 2023

September – October

Belonging Together



Tandi Rogers / UU Stock Photo

Dear Rochester-Area Unitarian Universalists,

In this season of Belonging Together, I've been thinking about how many hours it takes to develop an acquaintanceship, and then a friendship, and then a close friendship (see this [2018 study from the University of Kansas](#)). The main takeaway for me is not only how many hours it truly takes (and how hard that time can be to find in modern life with all its demands), and also... that sometimes all it takes to make a friend is time! Spend enough time with another person or group, and eventually you'll find your sense of belonging together.

This is part of how church works, too – We gather in community every Sunday, spending time together to build our sense of community. And if you spend time in a small group ministry, singing in the choir, working together on a social justice project, or volunteering with religious education, you're putting in hours with other human beings, creating relationships, friendships, and belonging.

This year's seasonal themes used for worship, small groups, religious education and these packets are also the result of relationship building among leaders of the three Rochester area churches. Now in its second year, this collaboration has deepened our sense of belonging. We

have learned what does and doesn't work. We are poised to engage this next year of collaboration at an even deeper and more intentional level because we belong together.

But is it all as simple as saying "we belong?" Can we simply declare to someone "You are welcome" or "You belong here" and expect that to be their experienced reality? Or perhaps, is belonging a verb rather than a noun – a continually renewed active state of being that we either cultivate or neglect, in our communities, families, relationships? One of the threads in this season is the question: What can I do to make belonging a reality?

Another question is what belonging looks like in a Unitarian Universalist community, where pluralism is a primary value? Where we don't rely on shared creeds, where we welcome difference and diversity, even with the tensions and discomfort that can come with it. This packet invites you into curiosity, as an antidote to any thought patterns of certainty that may limit what you think "belongs."

And lastly, I have a suspicion that belonging isn't a spectator sport. It takes diving into the waters ourselves, as much as it does assuring others that the water is warm.

So, I invite you to help us live into the grand collaboration, and mark your calendars for Friday September 22nd, when members and friends from all 3 churches will join in the sanctuary of First Unitarian for a community potluck, and "theme brainstorm" where we'll dive into all the upcoming themes for the year. We'll draw from the collective wisdom of all of us together, to generate ideas for worship, music, stories, spiritual practices, and more to ground us for this next year of collective & collaborative spiritual journeying, together.

In faith,
Rev. AJ van Tine
Assistant Minister
First Unitarian Church of Rochester

This packet was prepared by Suzanne Morgan and Tom Perry with the assistance of the three-church worship team, Rev. AJ van Tine, and the whole-hearted support of the packet writers' team.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge with respect the Seneca (Onöndowa'ga:') Nation, Keepers of the Western Door and part of the Haudenosaunee People, on whose ancestral land First Unitarian Church of Rochester, First Universalist Church of Rochester, and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua now stand.

CHALICE LIGHTING

Let the Chalice Connect Us by Catherine Callahan

As the chalice is lit let us come together into the sacred space we have created.
Let the cares of the day fall away and know that here is a place for quiet reflection,
for a pause in our lives, for breathing into our true selves.
Let what is said and felt here add richness to the dimensions of our lives and spiritual practices.
We are strong together in community.
We share the experience of being human.
Let the warmth of the chalice lit during our time together
connect us and carry us into the world.

So That We Might, Together, Shine by Rev. Erik Walker Wikstrom

When we light our chalice
everyone focuses on the flame.
Yet it is the paraffin of the candle,
the cotton of the wick,
the potassium chlorate and sulfur of the match,
and the oxygen in the air around us
that makes that flame possible.
As leaders we are not called to be
a lone beacon on a hill.
Rather, we are meant to work together
so that we might, together, shine.



CHALICE EXTINGUISHING

Carry the Flame by Rev. Brian Kiely

The Chalice is now extinguished,
but its light lives on in the minds and hearts and souls of each one of you.
Carry that flame with you as you leave this place and share it
With those you know
With those you love
and most especially, with those you have yet to meet.

Extinguishing the Chalice by Rev. Martha L Munson

First Universalist Church of Rochester, NY (2011–2014)
We extinguish the chalice here that it might glow gently in our hearts.
May it light your path as you leave this place.
May it guide your way until we are together again.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

These spiritual exercises are ways to build your spiritual reflection muscles as you explore the theme. Pick one that calls to you most, or try all of them. And it's okay if the experience fizzles or falls flat for you, that might reveal a deeper truth still.

Exercise A. Be curious rather than certain.

At a time when it feels like the dividing line between “left” and “right”, “liberal” and “conservative” has become more like a chasm, one thing is clear – people on both sides are certain that their view is the correct one, and the folks on the other side are in the wrong.

For this exercise, look for those moments when someone is expressing an opinion that you don't agree with, or sharing an identity you have difficulty understanding. If you notice yourself approaching the difference with a viewpoint of “right” vs. “wrong”, try saying to yourself “curiosity, not certainty”.

Ask the other person questions about their views, while resisting the urge to put forth your own views for the time being. Notice what comes up for you while doing so. Do you experience frustration? Anger? Resentment? Empathy?

Exercise B. Whose am I?

For this exercise, make a list of the different people and communities in your life with whom you are in relationship. These may be family, friends, colleagues, teammates, neighbors, political or professional affiliations, or any other person or group with whom you feel a connection. Use this list to create a visual depiction answering the question “Whose am I?” To organize this depiction, you might want to use one of the following:

- 1) Create a photo collage or “altar” with pictures or images that represent the different people and groups you are in relationship with.
- 2) On a large sheet of paper, draw a set of concentric circles (at least four or five). Label the inner circle “myself”. Look at the names and groups you listed and decide how you might distribute them among the different rings. Which people or groups are in the circle immediately adjacent to you (which relationships are most central to your identity) and which ones are a little farther out? Are their positions on this diagram fixed or fluid? You might also like to try this exercise as a Venn diagram with overlapping circles – how do your different communities and connections intersect?
- 3) Another way to depict these relationships would be through drawing a web, with lines connecting you and the people or groups on your list, then explore how they connect with each other.



Original art by Amy Stockwell

Exercise C. Pronouns: What's all this "We" stuff?

While Unitarian Universalist commitments to gender diversity and expansiveness call us to attention and care in respecting people's third person singular gendered pronouns (such as He, She, They, Ze, and Fae), our commitments to belonging and welcoming remind us to not neglect the gender-neutral, first-person plural pronoun "We," either! We, us, and our are such common words that they can sometimes be used without full clarity of who is being referred to, and who might be excluded. Often, the person using the term "we" won't realize the assumptions being made, but those on the margins can have a heightened awareness of whether they're really included in that "we" statement.

An exercise you can practice throughout the season is to simply practice paying attention to the word "we." Anytime you use it or you hear someone else use it, take the opportunity to pause and reflect on who the "we" is, who is included in that, and who is excluded. Once you've trained your brain to notice "we" in common use, you can then take the exercise further by considering if there's a way to be more specific about the "we," so that it's more clear who is meant, or if there's a deeper shift that is called for.

Exercise D. Nerdy Birdy (intergenerational)

For this exercise, families may choose to read or listen to the children's picture book *Nerdy Birdy* by Aaron Reynolds (2015). This book is a humorous but poignant examination of the ways in which groups decide who is an outsider vs. insider.

Some questions your family may wish to discuss after reading or viewing this book:

- Which character or characters do you feel you are most similar to, and why?
- Can you think of people you know who are like the different characters in the book?
- Why do you think the nerdy birdies wouldn't let Vulture into their group?
- Why do you think Nerdy Birdy was willing to risk losing his nerdy friends in order to befriend Vulture? What qualities would someone need to have to make that choice?

Link to video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwHuyt2JfYE&t=2s>

For families with older kids: There are many chapter books that address the topic of outsider vs. insider. Some that you might want to read together are *Fish in a Tree* by Lynda Mullaly Hunt, *Okay for Now* by Gary D. Schmidt, *Nat Enough* by Maria Scrivan, *Blended* by Sharon M. Draper, or *Schooled* by Gordon Korman.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

These questions aren't "homework" that need to be covered entirely. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The questions often lead not to answers, but more questions.

1. What helps you feel like you belong in a place or community?
2. What signals to you that you might not belong?
3. Is there a single word that might describe what it feels like to feel complete belonging with another person or group?
4. How would you help foster a feeling of belonging in someone who is newly entering a community that you are an established member of?
5. Have you ever witnessed someone (maybe you've been this person yourself) who made their way to belonging in a space that tried at first to keep them out?
6. How do the various identities you hold (race, gender, sexuality, age, culture, language, etc.) impact your sense of belonging in different groups?
7. Can you belong all by yourself? Or does it take a "together" to make belonging a reality?
8. When conflict arises, what can one do to maintain belonging together, without sweeping tensions under the rug?



Amy Stockwell

RESOURCES

Just as we select spiritual exercises that speak to a diversity of experience, we draw from a diversity of sources and include a diversity of voices here. We explicitly seek voices and perspectives of people with disabilities, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), Women, Trans and Non-Binary People, other members of the LGBTQ community, children and youth.

FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

STLT#354 We Laugh, We Cry

<https://farfringe.com/2017/09/19/stlt354-we-laugh-we-cry/>

<https://youtu.be/DNRHoiks9bA>

STJ#1008 When Our Heart Is in a Holy Place

<https://farfringe.com/2017/11/26/stj1008-when-our-heart-is-in-a-holy-place>

<https://youtu.be/OGW10y8KuNg>

STLT#18 What Wondrous Love

<https://farfringe.com/2016/10/21/stlt18-what-wondrous-love/>

Two recorded versions at Far Fringe... don't skip the Chelsea Moon version

Remind Us Again, Brave Friends

Excerpted from Rev. Victoria Safford's sermon at the [2008 General Assembly Service of the Living Tradition](#)

Douglas Steere, a Quaker teacher, says that the ancient question, "Who am I?" inevitably leads to a deeper one, "Whose am I?"—because there is no identity outside of relationship. You can't be a person by yourself. To ask "Whose am I?" is to extend the question far beyond the little self-absorbed self, and wonder: Who needs you? Who loves you? To whom are you accountable? To whom do you answer? Whose life is altered by your choices? With whose life, whose lives, is your own all bound up, inextricably, in obvious or invisible ways?"

Why Unitarians and Universalists Belong Together: A Fifty-Year Recollection

Rev. Marilyn Sewell, Minister Emerita of the First Unitarian Church of Portland, OR

Brief review of the (cultural and theological) context and issues leading up to the merger and the somewhat problematic implementation that followed. Conclusion from 2011 is highly positive:

"We are Unitarian Universalists, and we belong together."

The Unfulfilled Dream

Rev. David E. Bumbaugh, Minister Emeritus of the Unitarian Church of Summit, NJ

A Universalist perspective of how the merger played out: a lament for the lost opportunity: "We neglected the Universalist challenge of restating our core convictions in contemporary terms...

What do we believe? Whom do we serve? To whom or what are we responsible?"

FROM SACRED TEXTS

Buddhist Teaching

Suppose there are two bundles of reeds. They can remain standing as long as they lean against each other. In like manner, because this exists, that exists and because that exists, this exists. If one of the two bundles is removed, then the other will fall.

-Shariputra, disciple of Shakyamuni



asierromero on Freepik

Indigenous Wisdom

When the Peacemaker brought the original Five Nations together under the Great Law of Peace, he demonstrated the confederacy's strength in unity by first taking one arrow and breaking it, then bundling five arrows together and showing how the bundle could not be broken. Centuries later, Haudenosaunee leaders, frustrated with the difficulty of dealing with a dozen different colonial governments, urged their neighbors to follow their example and unify. According to historian Bruce E. Johansen, as early as 1744, Benjamin Franklin's printing press was quoting Tadadaho Canasetoga's admonishments for unity among the colonies:

"Our wise forefathers established union and amity between the five nations. This has made us formidable. This has given us great weight and authority with our neighboring nations. We are a powerful Confederacy, and by your observing the same methods our wise forefathers have taken you will acquire much strength and power; therefore, whatever befalls you, do not fall out with one another."

- There is Strength in Unity, [Oneida Nation](#)

Hebrew Bible

Ruth 1:16-17

Context: Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, flee a famine in Bethlehem and settle in Moab where there is plenty of food and their sons find devoted wives. Within ten years, however, Naomi's husband and sons are dead. When she hears Judah has food again, she prepares to return as an old, bitter widow. One daughter-in-law, Ruth, insists on accompanying her.

16 Do not press me to leave you, to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God. **17** Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!"

Christian New Testament

1 Corinthians 12:14-16

Context: Paul's metaphor for the church is that of a human body. Like a body, the church is one organism. Like a healthy body, the church requires many, diverse members who serve a variety of functions.

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. **15** If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. **16** And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

POETRY EXCERPTS

Alone by Maya Angelou

Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.
Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

[Complete text read by Maya Angelou](#)

Often I Imagine the Earth by Dan Gerber

Often I imagine the earth
...
no beginning, no middle, no end,
soaring together like those
ancient Chinese birds
hatched miraculously with only one wing,
helping each other fly home.

[Complete text](#)



"Jian birds" from Sancai Tuhui

QUOTATIONS

Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn't require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are.

– Brené Brown, [The Gifts of Imperfection](#)

We can put our whole heart into whatever we do; but if we freeze our attitude into for or against, we're setting ourselves up for stress. Instead, we could just go forward with curiosity, wondering where this experiment will lead. This kind of open-ended inquisitiveness captures the spirit of enthusiasm, or heroic perseverance.

– Pema Chödrön, (2007) [No Time to Lose: A Timely Guide to the Way of the Bodhisattva](#), p.226, Shambhala Publications

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee.

– John Donne, [Meditation XVII from Devotions upon Emergent Occasions](#)

Religions are different roads converging on the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads as long as we reach the same goal? In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals.

- Mahatma Gandhi, [Mahatma Gandhi's Discovery of Religion](#)

Whether you believe in God or not does not matter so much, whether you believe in Buddha or not does not matter so much; as a Buddhist, whether you believe in reincarnation or not does not matter so much. You must lead a good life. And a good life does not mean just good food, good clothes, good shelter. These are not sufficient. A good motivation is what is needed: compassion, without dogmatism, without complicated philosophy; just understanding that others are human brothers and sisters and respecting their rights and human dignity.

- The Dalai Lama, [Kindness, Clarity, and Insight](#)

We may act sophisticated and worldly but I believe we feel safest when we go inside ourselves and find home, a place where we belong and maybe the only place we really do."

- Maya Angelou, [Letter to My Daughter](#)

Neighbor is not a geographic term. It is a moral concept.

- [Rabbi Joachim Prinz](#)

FURTHER ENGAGEMENT: PODCASTS, SONGS, ARTICLES, FILMS, & BOOKS

[Unitarian Universalist Covenant: What Do We Promise One Another?](#) (video 2:36)

As we grow our personal understanding, strengthen and deepen our community, and practice spiritual justice-making in our covenantal faith, we must ask, "What do we promise one another?"

[How to Create a UU Covenant](#) (PDF)

Basics on creating a covenant for small group ministries.

[The Legend of the Three Sisters](#)

The Haudenosaunee considered the Three Sisters to be divine gifts. Some versions of their legends involve the crops personified as three women who separate from each other only to find out that they are stronger together. Planted together the beans contribute nitrogen to the soil. The cornstalks serve as bean poles. The low-growing leaves of the squash shade the ground, preserving moisture and inhibiting weed growth.



Anne Perry

HUMOR & WHIMSY

STLT#159 This Is My Song by Finnish flashmob choir

<https://youtu.be/0vq4lYpxXTk>

Some Belong Jokes

What do you call men who make "Women belong in the kitchen" jokes?

Single.

What kind of pasta doesn't belong?

An impasta

Orcas don't belong in tanks.

You need to teach them how to drive one responsibly first.

My wife is pastafarian whereas I belong to the United Church of Bacon

Our son believes in spaghetti carbonara.

Lyla Mclean in UU Hysterical Society FaceBook Group

Kathy Trowbridge in UU Hysterical Society FaceBook Group

