

It's the Harvest Season We explore the UU Value - Generosity



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Our thematic seasons for the coming year explore the Unitarian Universalist shared values which together express our central value of love. We begin the year with . . .

Generosity

We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope.

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

(This document serves as a resource in spiritual deepening through worship, small groups, and individually. It results from a collaboration of First Universalist Church of Rochester, Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua and First Unitarian Church of Rochester. Free use is granted to Unitarian Universalist and related organizations.)

Dear Ones,

We begin this church year with the Harvest season, focusing on Generosity. Each fall, we encounter images of the cornucopia, a horn of plenty overflowing with the bounty of the harvest, the generous gifts from the Earth. I am awestruck each spring when the strawberries ripen. What a miracle that these treasures emerge from the earth.



Over the years, there have been questions among UU congregants suggesting that we have no theology, that we can believe anything. It's true that we have no dogma or creed. We definitely have theology, and its simplest expression is on the previous page. LOVE is at the center, surrounded by shared values: Generosity, Transformation, Equity, Interdependence, Pluralism and Justice. Our spiritual deepening seasons for the coming year offer us all an opportunity to explore each of these values, one per season.

The 'great Universalist heresy' of the late 1700s was that God is Love. A loving god would not deny salvation to anyone. There are no 'saved' and 'damned'. See Resources for more on this.

When thinking of generosity, what comes to mind? At first, I think of time, talent and treasure – I volunteer my time preferably using my unique talents and I give money and material possessions as I am able. But there are other aspects to generosity – what about heart, spirit, acceptance? These are essential to being radically welcoming congregations, to make room for the new ideas, ways of worship, music and activities that each new congregant inevitably brings. Being generously open to change leads to transformation.

The act of offering your presence or witness to another can be a powerful demonstration of what it means to be generous of spirit. There are times when offering to not only listen to, but to deeply hear and absorb another person's story without judgment is enough. There is generosity in the act of humbly receiving whatever others might offer. Gratitude for the other's gifts. Active participation in community is a gift – showing up for your small group, greeting those you haven't met, thanking worship participants, sharing your faith and your stories.

This season, we'll grapple with questions inherent in the definition of generosity. How does cultivating a spirit of gratitude and hope inspire generosity? How do we freely and compassionately share our faith, presence and resources both within and beyond our UU community? How does our generosity connect us to one another in relationships of interdependence and mutuality?

In faith,
Anne J. Perry
For the 3-church packet team
Member, First Unitarian Church of Rochester

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.

GRATITUDE

Gratitude to this season's packet team leads, Suzy Farrell and Anne Perry, the inspiring 3-church worship team and the supportive contributions of the entire packet team. We hope you find inspiration to explore what generosity means for you and your community.

READINGS FOR CHALICE LIGHTING

The Abundance of Our Lives Together

We light our chalice as a symbol of gratitude
as we celebrate the abundance of our lives together.

In this sanctuary we harvest bushels of strength for one another,
and offer our crop with the hands of compassion and generosity.

In the authentic and gentle manner of our connections,
We cultivate a simple sweetness to brighten our spirits.

May we be grateful for the ways we nourish and uplift each other,
For it is the sharing of this hallowed time together that sustains us.

-- Katie Sivani Gelfand, Director of Religious Exploration, First UU Church of New Orleans

Life is a gift for which we are grateful.
We gather in community to celebrate the glories and the mysteries of this great gift.
-- Rev. Marjorie Sams Montgomery, UU Minister, retired

Love Can Transform the World

Love is the aspiration, the spirit that moves and inspires this faith we share. Rightly understood, love can nurture our spirits and transform the world.

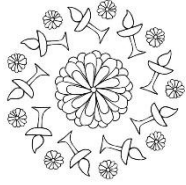
May the flame of this chalice honor and embody the power and the blessing of the love we need, the love we give, the love we are challenged always to remember and to share.

-- Rev. Maureen Killoran, UU Minister



CHALICE EXTINGUISHING

Move Through the World in Love



We extinguish this flame but not its meaning and mission in our hearts.
Our time together has come to an end.
Go in peace, be of service to one another,
and may you move through the world in love for all of your days.
-- Rev. Maggie Lovins, UU Community Minister, Pensacola, Florida

In the end it won't matter

In the end it won't matter how much we
have,
but how generously we have given.

It won't matter how much we know,
but rather how well we live.
And it won't matter how much we believe,
but how deeply we love.
-- Rev. John C. Morgan, UU Minister

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Exercise A. Generosity as a Reciprocal Act - The Generous Earth

“But the care of the Earth is our most ancient and most worthy goal and, after all, our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it, and to foster its renewal, is our only hope.” – Wendell Berry, American novelist and poet

In his book of essays called *The Art of Commonplace*, Wendell Berry expresses this view of our planet. He reminds us of the responsibility we have as dwellers of our home and asks us to “cherish” it.

Take a pause in your day to reflect on the love you have for our earth. Take time to notice and make a list of the multiple gifts you receive from our planet. Feel your gratitude. Decide how you can turn that appreciation into action to “foster” the earth’s renewal.



Photo credit: Suzy Farrell

Exercise B. Discover Your Gift and Give it Away

The origin of the following will probably never be known: “The purpose of life is to discover your gift. The meaning of life is to give it away.” In the coming week or two, journal on what your gifts are. Keep in mind that your gift may be things like friendship, a generous spirit or an open welcoming presence. Or it could be a unique talent.

Once you have identified your gift, how could you give it away? How would doing so enhance your relationships? Give it a try. Contemplate the present and future impact as we may never

know the effect we are having. As Mother Teresa said, “I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.”

Exercise C. Infectious Generosity

Begin by watching / listening to the TED talk ‘Infectious Generosity’.

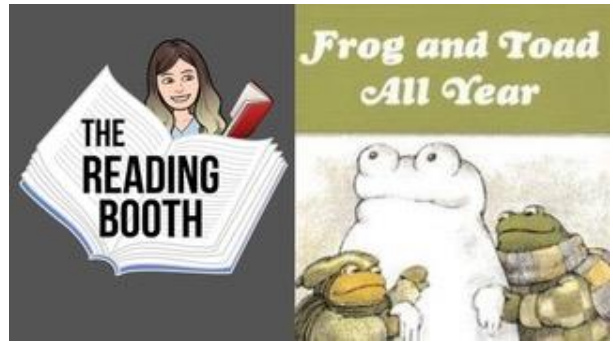
[TED Infectious Generosity](#)

The talk includes various examples of generosity that went viral. For example, the TED folks decided that TEDx would be an open brand that anyone could use, resulting in TED events all over the world. Sort of like what happens with these spiritual deepening packets where free use is granted to Unitarian Universalist and related organizations. After a few days, link up with a few friends, colleagues, family members (or you can do this on your own), and watch it again to spark a discussion of what activity you might do to practice generosity in your community. Plan and carry out the activity. What was the process like and how was your generosity received?

Exercise D. Multigenerational: Frog and Toad Story

[Fall - The Surprise](#)

This Frog and Toad story is read by Sarah with illustrations from the book. The Surprise tells the story of Frog’s and Toad’s generosity toward each other during the harvest season’s falling leaves. (Note: there are additional Frog and Toad story links in resources.) View the story with someone from a different generation, perhaps a child or grandchild. Talk about how Toad and Frog were being generous and kind to one another. Ask the other person to think of times when they have been generous toward someone and when someone has been generous toward them.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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. How does gratitude inspire your generosity?
2. How are you generous to yourself?
3. What happens in the time between your generous thought and the generous action?
4. What role do expectations of reciprocity play in your decision to be generous?
5. How does courage play a role in your generosity?
6. Have you ever had a gift that was rejected? How did that make you feel? What did you do about it?

7. How can generosity strengthen your relationships with other people?
8. What is the relationship between guilt and generosity? How do you see this in your experiences with giving or receiving help?
9. How do you respond to people on street corners asking for help? What goes through your mind in deciding whether and what to give?

RESOURCES

FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

Hymn #131 Singing the Living Tradition: Love Will Guide Us

[Foothills Unitarian Love Will Guide Us](#)

Hymn #402 Singing the Living Tradition: From you I Receive

[UU Church Springfield MA](#)

Hymn #1048 in Singing the Journey: Ubi Caritas

[Ubi Caritas](#)

Where charity and love are, God is there. “I think that the words themselves evoke something of a miracle. I think that when we remember that it is our actions that evoke and represent the love beyond our understanding, new abilities to love emerge. We can always love more, give more, empathize more. These songs help us do that.”

-- Rev. Kimberly Debus, UU community minister, in “Notes from the Far Fringe” blog

From ***Love is at the Center: Unitarian Universalist Theologies***, Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt, editor.

“Love is hospitality, which, like hope, is more than a Sunday morning expression or program. Hospitality is a posture, a way of being in the world. Radical welcoming will likely stretch many Unitarian Universalists who hold tightly to historic Enlightenment principles and values, which can have a narrowing and exclusionary nature. Peter Choi suggests that we might want to be ‘skeptical of aspirational language that enables us to preserve the status quo.’⁴ For example, some of us, in our eagerness to gift others with our unique way of religion, don’t pause long enough to be mindful that radical hospitality also means receiving the gift of the other as they are (and not as we wish them to be), open to the way this gift might broaden and deepen us. Love as hospitality calls us to more than intellectual freedom, sharpened skills of reason, or willingness to tolerate another’s views. Love is about trust, care, and respect; love is about possibility. Love as radical hospitality, and welcome is receiving the gift of another as they are.”

-- Frederic Muir, Chapter 23, “Liberating Love” pp 188-189 Kindle edition

⁴ Peter Choi, “Deconstructed, reimagined faith,” *Christian Century* (June 2023)

Generosity is a Spiritual Practice

“When people hear that ‘generosity is a spiritual practice’ they think in terms of giving away money or material possessions. Rev. Lee Anne explores some of the other dimensions of

generosity—generosity of heart, generosity of spirit, and generosity of acceptance, just to name a few.”

-- Rev. Lee Anne Washington, description of sermon at UU Church of Jacksonville, Florida, June 12, 2023 [Sermon Generosity is a Spiritual Practice](#)

“The great **Universalist heresy** – the one that so threatened evangelical and Calvinist groups in New England in the late 18th and early 19th century that they vehemently opposed it, denying Universalist preachers access to their pulpits and to positions of public power – was that the nature of God is Love. This love, embedded in the fabric of the universe, was strong, nurturing, and inclusive. It would not let go of anyone, ever. Grounded in this love, Universalists rejected any ideas of an afterlife that ultimately separated humankind into the “saved” and the “damned.” They rejected the violence and cruelty inherent in traditional notions of atonement which understood God as having ordained Jesus to suffer and die on behalf of humanity. Instead, with salvation as a given, the locus of religiosity became this world, rather than the next, among these people. The Universalists focused on the process of living as one of coming into greater alignment with love as a response to the unshakable foundation of knowing one was already, completely held in Love.

“Following a similar thread, the early Unitarians in 19th century New England held an understanding of religious life as one of growing the soul towards likeness to God, whom they also understood as loving. They understood love as one of the capacities of the soul inherent in every human being. They did not suggest their parishioners should remove themselves from society in lives of contemplation and prayer, but rather that they ‘unfold the divine likeness’ within themselves through the daily activities of living.”

-- Rev. Dr. Sheri Prud'homme, UU theologian, “Theological Reflection on the Proposed Revision to Article II” [Theology Prud'homme](#)

FROM SACRED TEXTS

Buddhist Practice of Generosity

“It takes time to practice generosity, but being generous is the best use of our time.”

— Thich Nhat Hanh

“**Giving (dana) is an essential Buddhist practice. It is about generosity, openness, and our capacity to embrace others with compassion and love.** When we truly see ourselves as others and others as ourselves, we naturally want to do everything we can to secure their happiness and well-being, because we know that it is also our own well-being and happiness. . . .

“There is a kind of vegetable in Vietnam called *he* (pronounced “hey”). It belongs to the onion family and looks like a scallion, and it is very good in soup. The more you cut the *he* plants at the base, the more they grow. If you don’t cut them they won’t grow very much. But if you cut them often, right at the base of the stalk, they grow bigger and bigger. This is also true of the practice of dana. If you give and continue to give, you become richer and richer all the time, richer in terms of happiness and well-being. This may seem strange but it is always true.”

-- from the Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation, [Buddhist Generosity](#)

Islam

“Islam encourages this concept of generosity so much so that it is embedded in one of the five pillars of Islam, the obligatory charity known as *Zakaat*. In Arabic, the term *zakaat* literally means purification of the heart however; it is also the payment, from surplus money, of an obligatory charity designed by God to provide for all the needy members of the community. . . . There is also another form of generosity in Islam called *sadaqa*. Linguistically, *sadaqa* means truthfulness, and some scholars have described it as the heart being truthful to its Creator. Anything given generously - freely to others - with the intention of pleasing God is *sadaqa*. *Sadaqa* can be as simple as a smile, helping an elderly person with their groceries or removing objects from the road or path.” [IslamReligion.com/generosity](https://www.islamreligion.com/generosity)

Christian New Testament – The Gift of Love



¹If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

-- Christian Bible New Testament, New Revised Standard Version, 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

POETRY EXCERPTS

Small Kindnesses

. . . We have so little of each other, now. So far from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of exchange. What if they are the true dwelling of the holy, these fleeting temples we make together when we say, “Here, have my seat,” “Go ahead—you first,” “I like your hat.”

-- Danusha Laméris, American poet, teacher and essayist. From *Healing the Divide: Poems of Kindness and Connection* (Green Writers Press, 2019) [Small Kindnesses](#)

QUOTATIONS

A Lifelong Sharing

“Love cannot remain by itself – it has no meaning. Love has to be put into action, and that action is service. Whatever form we are, able or disabled, rich or poor, it is not how much we do, but how much love we put in the doing; a lifelong sharing of love with others.”

— Mother Teresa, reading #562 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

“Rings and jewels are not gifts, but apologies for gifts. The only gift is a portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me. Therefore the poet brings his poem; the shepherd, his lamb; the farmer, corn; the miner, a stone; the painter, his picture; the girl, a handkerchief of her own sewing.”
-- Ralph Waldo Emerson, in essay “Gifts”, 1843

“Helping, fixing and serving represent three different ways of seeing life. When you help, you see life as weak. When you fix, you see life as broken. When you serve, you see life as whole. Fixing and helping may be the work of the ego, and service the work of the soul.”
-- Rachel Naomi Remen, MD [Helping Fixing Serving](#)

“... gift economies tend to be marked by three related obligations: the obligation to give, the obligation to accept, and the obligation to reciprocate.”
-- *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World*, by Lewis Hyde, 1983, Introduction, p. xxxvi

Ezra Pound’s Gift

“In 1921 (T.S.) Eliot left the manuscript of *The Waste Land* with (Ezra) Pound, and Pound went through it with his red pencil. He thought it was a masterpiece. And why should its author not go on writing such masterpieces? Well, he was working as a clerk in Lloyd’s Bank in London and didn’t have the time. Pound decided to free him. He organized a subscription plan called “Bel Esprit.” The idea was to find thirty people who could chip in fifty dollars each to help support Elliot. . . (In the end, not enough subscribers were found and Eliot was embarrassed by the show. The publicity may have helped to draw the \$2,000 Dial prize to him in 1922, however.)”
-- *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World*, by Lewis Hyde, 1983, p. 302

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

Defying the Nazis: The Sharps’ War

This is our own UU story of extreme generosity and sacrifice and, in the end, involves the creation of the UU Service Committee. “Ken Burns examines the previously untold account of Waitstill and Martha Sharp, an American (Unitarian) minister and his wife from Wellesley, Massachusetts, who left their children behind in the care of their parish and boldly committed to a life-threatening mission in Europe.” [Ken Burns on Defying the Nazis](#)

The film is available on PBS Passport. Free versions are available in two parts at these links:

[Part I Defying the Nazis](#)

[Part II Defying the Nazis](#)

The Day the World Came to Town: 9/11 in Gander, Newfoundland

Talk about generosity! 38 plane loads of people were diverted to Canada when the World Trade Center was attacked. Gander, a town of 10,300 people welcomed nearly 7,000 additional people. They generously fed, housed, and transported them. Even connected them to WiFi.

– Jim DeFede, American author and journalist

[Monroe County Library The Day the World Came to Town](#)

Spiritual Practice

“This practice of generosity benefits the recipients in several ways. First, and perhaps most importantly, it demonstrates to an individual recipient that he or she is not alone, but that there are individuals who care enough to offer their tangible support. . . .

“The benefits to the recipients of generosity are quite apparent, but what about the benefits to the practitioners of generosity? There are, in fact, just as many, and the main ones are as follows:

- Generosity helps the practitioner to be more mindful of their interconnectedness with the world at large, and to play an active part in making the world a better and friendlier place.
- Generosity helps the practitioner to express their own gratitude to the universe by giving someone else an opportunity to experience the same.
- Generosity helps the practitioner to use their resources in a more thoughtful, positive and altruistic manner.
- Generosity simply feels good.”

-- Ian, from blogpost [Spirituality for Seekers](#)

More Frog and Toad Stories

Frog and Toad are good friends who can be found together whether they are enjoying life or navigating life’s struggles. They are always generous toward one another.

[Frog and Toad are Friends](#)
[Frog and Toad Together](#)

Surgeon allows patients to pay by volunteering

Discovering that patients went into tremendous debt, he offered the option of volunteering in nonprofit organizations instead of payment. A ripple effect was better patient outcomes from becoming more involved in their communities.

[Dr Demetrio Aguila Story](#)
[Ripple Effects Dr Aguila](#)

FAITH IN ACTION

Spiritual Deepening 3-Church Brainstorming & Potluck

Friday, September 20, 2024, 6-8 pm, First Universalist Church, 150 So. Clinton Ave., Rochester. Join in community to share a meal and generously offer your thoughts, ideas, perspectives to the 3-church worship team and the spiritual deepening packet team on Transformation, Equity, Interdependence, Pluralism and Justice. All ages are welcome.

Climate March Sept. 27 4pm-7pm, Washington Square Park:

[Climate March Sept 27](#)

UU Climate Justice Revival Sept.28-29

National program sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Association
(*Note: First Unitarian is doing this November 16-17.*)

[UU Climate Justice Revival](#)

Indigenous Peoples Day, October 14

The City of Rochester and various organizations sponsor activities on Indigenous Peoples' Day.

[Indigenous Peoples Day Activities](#)

Visit Ganondagan, Seneca Art & Culture Center, in Victor, NY. [Ganondagan](#)

General Election Early Voting – Saturday October 26 through Sunday, November 3.

Any registered voter can vote at any of the locations in their county of residence. Early voting is a practical act--your vote is in the bank without risk of a last-minute illness or emergency and at your convenience. It's a very generous act--the people working to get everyone to the polls will know you've voted, and they can use their time to get others out to vote. Monroe County UUs plan to meet at Susan B. Anthony House, Sunday afternoon, October 27, to cast our ballots. Please check your church's newsletter for additional details. Carpooling is encouraged.

[Monroe County Early Voting](#)

[Ontario County Early Voting](#)

[Wayne County Early Voting](#)

Fruition Seeds (Naples, NY) has decided to stop selling seeds and, instead give them away.

Learn more about them here: [Fruition Seeds FAQs](#)

Foodlink [Foodlink](#)

Community Wishbook – central website for many charities looking for specific donations and volunteers. [Community Wishbook](#)

HUMOR

From UU Hysterical Society

