

The Muddy Season

Interdependence

A collaboration of First Universalist Church of Rochester,
Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua, and First Unitarian Church of Rochester.

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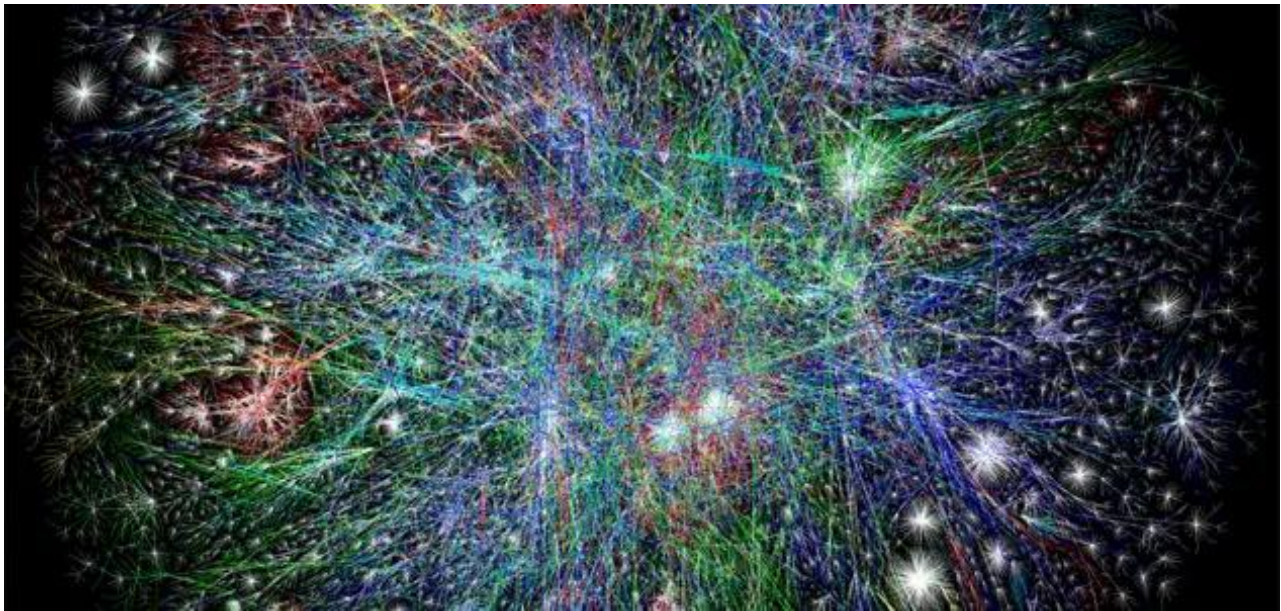


Photo Credit: Joseph Stromberg, Smithsonian Magazine

We honor the interdependent web of all existence. With reverence for the great web of life and with humility, we acknowledge our place in it.

We covenant to protect Earth and all beings from exploitation. We will create & nurture sustainable relationships of care & respect, mutuality and justice. We will work to repair harm and damaged relationships.

from UUA Article II

Beloveds,

I have a strange confession. I'm a Trinitarian Unitarian. The Unitarian in UU comes from our forebears' focus on the unity of God instead of the Trinity. I'm 1700 years too late and not Christian, not really a theist most days, so I'm not digging up old arguments (although St. Nick slapping our guy Arius at the Council of Nicea is a fun distraction), but when I want frameworks for sacred divinity, it's the trinity for me. Whether you name Creator, Redeemer, & Sustainer; or Mother, Child, & Womb; or Love, Lover, & Beloved; or Source, Wellspring, & Living Water, it's always these interdependent descriptions that stir my soul. I want god to be in swirling, dancing relationship. I want a Holy Love that is

- Beyond us: transcendent, bigger than any of us, awesome like Webb telescope photos
- With us: slipping into the tender places of doubt, fear, grief, joy, wonder, and delight,
- Among us: alive in our relationships, present in conflict and collaboration, known in covenant and families and teams and the simple power of friendship.

I came to this through Buddhism and deep ecology. Deep ecology describes the natural world as ecosystems of complex relationships. Buddhists say the existence of any person or thing is only possible given all of the circumstances and conditions that led up to it. And then there's lunch. I am able to eat not only because I do a job that pays me so I can pick up sushi, but also because of the hands that planted, picked, and prepared the food before it arrived at my table. My very nourishment relies on yeast and worms, truckers, scientists and subsidies, migrant workers deemed illegal for wanting safety and a livelihood, and so much else. As I take in this web that sustains me, what else could I be but grateful?

Sometimes we mistakenly swap out the word interdependence for interconnection. I suspect some discomfort with the idea of dependence. Sure, we're all connected—but Buddhism, deep ecology, Trinitarian Christianity, most polytheistic and nature-based spiritual paths, and the UU value of Interdependence push us further. It's not just that we're connected, it's that we actually rely on one another. It does not take from us our agency, capacity, or empowerment, but it does require vulnerability and inspire gratitude. As the South African concept of Ubuntu puts it, *I am because you are.*

Interdependence invites me to see all creation as worthy. Interdependence is an antidote to the individualism and isolation of late capitalism. Interdependence helps me understand god more deeply. Interdependence reminds me that the ways white supremacy has embedded itself in my behavior and life is not my fault and is also my responsibility to change. Interdependence does not let me trade personal freedom for collective liberation. Interdependence is beautiful and hard. I hope this season's packet is all of this and so much more for you and your group. Have fun!

Love and courage,

Rev. Shari

Lead Minister, First Unitarian Church of Rochester

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge with respect the Seneca Nation, Keepers of the Western Door and part of the Haudenosaunee People, on whose ancestral and contemporary land our three Unitarian Universalist churches now stand.

READINGS FOR CHALICE LIGHTING

Chalice Lighting by Rev Paul Sprecher

We light this chalice for the web of life which sustains us,
For the sacred circle of life in which we have our being,
For the Earth, the Sky, Above and Below, and
For our Mother Earth, and for the Mystery.

Living by Charles Thomas

We are living in a universe
possibly part
of a multiverse.
We are living in the Milky Way
a part
of the Local Group of galaxies
a part
of a supercluster of galaxies.
We are living in a solar system
in a spiral arm
of the Milky Way.
We are living on a planet
powered by
the sun.
for ourselves
and for each other.

We are living on a planet
called Earth
with rocks and trees
and birds and leaves
and oceans
and mountains
and lakes
and everything beautiful
and everything good
to care for
as they care for us.
We are living today
with time to do good



READINGS FOR CHALICE EXTINGUISHING

We Are One by Rev Amy Zucker Morgenstern

Never has it been more true than now:
We extinguish this flame,
But the sparks within us remain alight.
From each of us, in our supposed solitude,
The signals buzz and hum, sparkling through space one to another,
Connecting us invisibly
But palpably.
We are one.
And from every window,
Our light shines.

Universal Rhythm by Rev Israel Buffardi

My friends, when you go from here, know that our hearts are always in a holy place, for we are
always connected to one another.
Know that deep down, our hearts beat in one universal rhythm.
May we each find the sacred space to hear it.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

A. Gratitude Journal 201. Many people find keeping a gratitude journal a nourishing spiritual practice, a place to quickly note and reflect on the big or small positive things that happened in your day. Try it! You can also try expanding this practice to include those in your community who have contributed to your gratitude. Make a point to thank them, either verbally or in writing, for their kindnesses, large or small. Reflect on how this extension into community connection feels and take a look at the Community Building poster (on last page) for other ways to extend this feeling of belonging to and contributing to community.

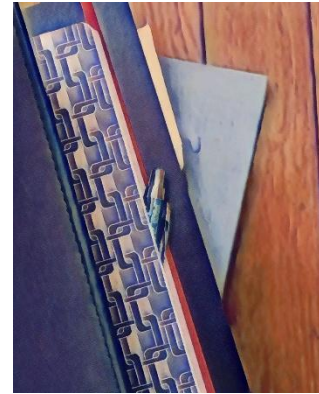


Photo by Mary Hammele

B. Healing Relationships, Healing the World. Gardeners know that weeds must be pulled, soil must be stirred and nourished, invasive plants eliminated, and seeds tended. All these activities require getting muddy! Reflect on the gardening metaphor and apply it to a difficult relationship in your life. Is this relationship a weed that should be pulled, or a desirable plant that needs to be cultivated and encouraged? How is a difficult relationship like a gardener getting muddy? How might relaxing your expectations change the muddiness of the connection? After reflection, jot down some steps to take—including an idea of timing—to create more flourishing in your personal and community gardens.

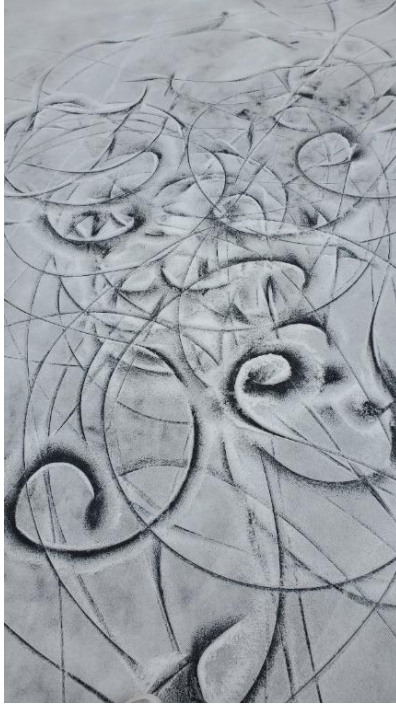
C. Where Does our Food Come From? At a gathering (family, friends, small group) over a meal, take turns thinking about one of the dishes on the table, and working through all the links that got that food to your table. Make a game of guessing how many people might have been involved, whether locally sourced produce or a prepared, packaged item with an ingredient label. These people might include the growers, the harvesters, the packaging manufacturers, the shippers, the recipe creators, the cook(s), etc. Reflect on the interconnectedness of crucial things in our lives, as well as our dependence on nature. Does doing this exercise help you take fewer things for granted? How can you show gratitude to the known and unknown people who made it possible for you to eat?

D. The Circular or Gift Economy. Reducing, reusing, recycling, and recovering makes interdependence visible. An example would be a local buy-nothing group. Think about ways that you might participate in the gift economy, either deepening your involvement in existing circles or finding new ways to participate. Pick a day, a week, or a month and resolve to buy nothing. How can you meet your own needs, and your community's needs, through gifting and receiving goods & services, rather than purchasing them?

E. To Be Loved into Being. Many of us have had a special person in our lives who was willing to give us their undivided attention during an especially formative time in our lives, leaving an indelible mark. They might be a relative, a neighbor, or a teacher. These people may not be living anymore, yet they still hold a special place in your heart. Take yourself back to that time and reflect on that relationship. What was the situation and how did you both connect? For extra credit, take a large sheet of paper, put yourself in the middle and place the names of those who have influenced you, both close and more distant, reflecting on the circles of interdependence and influence that shape your life.

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.



Skating Tracks. Photo courtesy of A. Mangan

1. In the midst of constant change, what forces of interdependence stay constant?
2. How have your gifts to your community come back to you, as feelings, as insights, as connections, etc?
3. What is the difference in relating to natural resources as gifts rather than commodities?
4. As you witness the suffering of the world and experience your own suffering, how do you balance holding onto the weight of it all while still moving forward?
5. When does helping someone look like holding their hand, and when does it look like letting go?
6. What are the differences and similarities between interdependence and interconnectedness?
7. In what ways does observing the regenerative power of nature give you insights into relationships?
8. Describe a time you experienced ubuntu, the concept of "I am because you are."
9. How does community support you in difficult times?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

[From You I Receive](#) Hymn 402, SLT. Words & Music by Joseph and Nathan Segal.
Performed by Unitarian Universalist Society of Grafton and Upton.
From you, I receive.
To you, I give.
Together we share.
And from this we live.

Meditation, by Rev. Margaret Keip
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,
linked with each other



Dragonomages Royalty Free

“In a moment of tremendous doubt, reaching out to someone else reminded me I’m not alone. It’s a lesson I learn again and again. We don’t create any real positive impact alone. Community gives us strength. Love gives us courage. Remembering we are not alone – remembering the people, the family, the community, the ancestors we belong to – gives us resiliency and power to keep on loving, keep on acting, keep on working for the values and commitments we hold dear.” – Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

WISDOM FROM WORLD RELIGIONS

Taoist Traditions

Tao Te Ching, Chapter 39,
by Lao Tzu (translated by Stephen Mitchell)

In harmony with the Tao,
the sky is clear and spacious,
the earth is solid and full,
all creatures flourish together,
content with the way they are,
endlessly repeating themselves,
endlessly renewed.

When man interferes with the Tao,

the sky becomes filthy,
the earth becomes depleted,
the equilibrium crumbles,
creatures become extinct.

The Master views the parts with
compassion,
because he understands the whole.
His constant practice is humility.
He doesn’t glitter like a jewel
but lets himself be shaped by the Tao,
as rugged and common as stone.

Buddhism

“We are destined to share this planet together and as the world grows smaller, we need each other more than in the past. ...What is required is a kind heart and a sense of community, which I call universal responsibility.” – His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Judaism

“Whoever saves a single life is considered by scripture to have saved the whole world.”
– The Talmud, Sanhedrin 37a

“Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.” – [Pirkei Avot](#) 2:16.

Christian Tradition and Philosophy

“The Unity in whose loving presence the universe unfolds is inside each person as a call to welcome the stranger, protect animals and the earth, respect the dignity of each person, think new thoughts, and help bring about ecological civilizations.” – [John B. Cobb](#), theologian & environmentalist, and [Farhan A. Shah](#), Islamic scholar of process philosophy

“The misconception which has haunted philosophic literature throughout the centuries is the notion of 'independent existence.' There is no such mode of existence; every entity is to be understood in terms of the way it is interwoven with the rest of the universe.”
– [Alfred North Whitehead](#), process metaphysician

“The more we know about how our planet works, the more we see just how badly we, its present caretakers, have been looking after it. the church must not go slow on its responsibilities to understand our human vocation as stewards of creation and to [must] lead the way both in responsible living ourselves and in encouraging and lobbying for larger policies which will bring a measure of God’s order to his wonderful but wounded world.” – [N. T. Wright](#), Sr Research Fellow, Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

POETRY EXCERPTS

All People, from *A Collection of Collections: Black American Poetry*, by [John F. Dilworth II](#)

We’re all just people
Working together
Working against each other
Living together
Living apart
Loving
And hating
And having it all
Having a ball
And suffering
Through happiness and pain
Striving
For more
Hurting for more
And I am no exception.



Photo courtesy of MS Momentum Magazine

QUOTATIONS

“It’s in that convergence of spiritual people becoming active and active people becoming spiritual that the hope of humanity now rests.” – [Van Jones](#), author and civil rights activist

“Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.”
– [Chief Seattle](#), Duwamish warrior, visionary, peacemaker, innovator, and leader

“We are investing again in communities of care and compassion, not only for one another, but for the Earth. I think what we’re really leaning toward is a kind of interspecies justice, to say that this mutual responsibility that we have for one another is our primary spiritual responsibility.”
– [Robin Wall Kimmerer](#), botanist, professor, and member of the [Citizen Potawatomi Nation](#)

“We are all connected; To each other, biologically. To the earth, chemically. To the rest of the universe atomically.” – [Neil deGrasse Tyson](#), astrophysicist and author

“Look deep into nature and then you will understand everything better.” – [Albert Einstein](#), theoretical physicist

“Interbeing is the understanding that nothing exists separately from anything else. We are all interconnected. By taking care of another person, you take care of yourself. By taking care of yourself, you take care of the other person. Happiness and safety are not individual matters. If you suffer, I suffer. If you are not safe, I am not safe. There is no way for me to be truly happy if you are suffering. If you can smile, I can smile too. The understanding of interbeing is very important. It helps us to remove the illusion of loneliness, and transform the anger that comes from the feeling of separation.” – [Thich Nhat Hanh](#), Buddhist monk, author, & peace activist, excerpt from [How to Fight](#)

“It’s terribly important ... to have this feeling of the interdependence of every form of life upon every other form of life. ... the so-called conflict of various species with each other, is not actually a competition. It’s a very strange system of interrelationship, of things feeding on each other and cultivating each other at the same time—the idea of the friendly enemy, the necessary adversary who is part of you. ... You have to understand this as the basis, apply this “not forcing anything,” and you get spontaneity: a life which is so of itself, which is natural, which is not forced, which is not unduly self-conscious.” – [Alan Watts](#), writer, philosopher, & lecturer, excerpt from [Taoist Way](#) YouTube audio recording

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

Books (links to Monroe County Library System)

[The Serviceberry](#), by Robin Wall Kimmerer. A short book on abundance and reciprocity in the natural world, and the promise of the gift economy.

[Stitches](#), by Anne Lamott. A meditation on meaning, hope and repair, the power of community and connection in the experience of grief and loss.

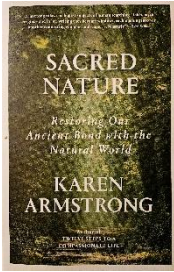
[The Hidden Life of Trees](#), by Peter Wohlleben. Forester describes social life of trees, including many of examples of supportive and communicative activities.

[Entangled Life](#), by Merlin Sheldrake. Explores the vast fungi entanglements underground that support and sustain living systems.

[Biomimicry](#), by Dora Lee. Book in children’s section highlights many human inventions that were inspired from observation of nature’s solutions.

[I Am You: A Book About Ubuntu](#), by Refiloe Moahloli

This book introduces the concept of ubuntu, an idea that we are all connected.



[Sacred Nature: Restoring Our Ancient Bond with the Natural World](#), by Karen Armstrong. Re-sacralizing nature for modern times, Armstrong shows how nature has a central place in spirituality across centuries, with guidance for forming a deeper connection.

[The Regenerative Garden: 80 Practical Projects for Creating a Self-Sustaining Garden](#), by Stephanie Rose, 2022.

Suggestions on ways to implement permaculture, aid for pollinators and more.

Articles for Further Study

[What Is Complex Systems Science](#), Santa Fe Institute. Illuminating the complex overlapping interactions among the forces in our lives.

[The Power of Weak Ties in Gaining New Employment](#), by Peter Dizikes, MIT News, Sep 15, 2022, article about the benefits of casual acquaintances in the job market.

[Reconnections: In Kinship with Nature](#), A UN art exhibit that highlights the importance of the relationships between humans and the environment.

Songs

[I Need You to Survive](#), by David Frazier, led by Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout at UUGA 2018

[Lean on Me](#), by Bill Withers, sung by Foothills Unitarian Church

[All Creatures of the Earth and Sky](#), STLT #203, attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, arranged by Michael Tacy

[Wake Now My Senses](#), STLT #298, Words Thomas Mickleson, Traditional Irish melody

Wake now, my senses and hear the earth call
Feel the deep power of being in all;
Keep, with the web of creation your vow,
Giving, receiving as love shows us how



Stock Cake free image

Videos

[Ubuntu: The One Word to Change How You Work, Live, and Lead](#). In Shola Richards TEDx presentation, he speaks on Ubuntu, an Nguni/Bantu word which means "I am because you are." He gives examples of this interdependence of people. (See also this topic in Books.)

[Strategies to Widen Your Social Universe](#), by Tanya Menon, TEDxOhioState, May, 2017.

The video on the idea of strong power, weak ties which is the concept that casual acquaintances provide a wider network reach therefore giving the recipient more knowledge and broader interconnectedness.

[FORUM 2021 Keynote Address: Indigenous Wisdom Regarding the Future](#). Chief Oren Lyons, member of the Haudenosaenee Peoples, shares his perspectives regarding the future of the living beings and our planet. He bases his views with respect to the natural world.

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS / ACTIVITIES / FAITH IN ACTION

Check out Your Local Library: Books, audiobooks, games, family fun packets, magazines, internet access as well as a variety of activities and events for children and adults are all available on your library card. Find something you didn't know was available at the library, and chat with a librarian while you are at it!

Participate in High Acres Nature Area with Rochester Birding Association on April 19, 2025. Over a two-mile walk, expect to see at least 40 species of birds returning to nest or on their way to northern nesting grounds. Meet at 8:00am at the parking lot on Perinton Parkway about ¼ mile east of Waste Management. RSVP to leader: Rosemary Reilly, 585-748-0802



photo credit: Suzy Farrell

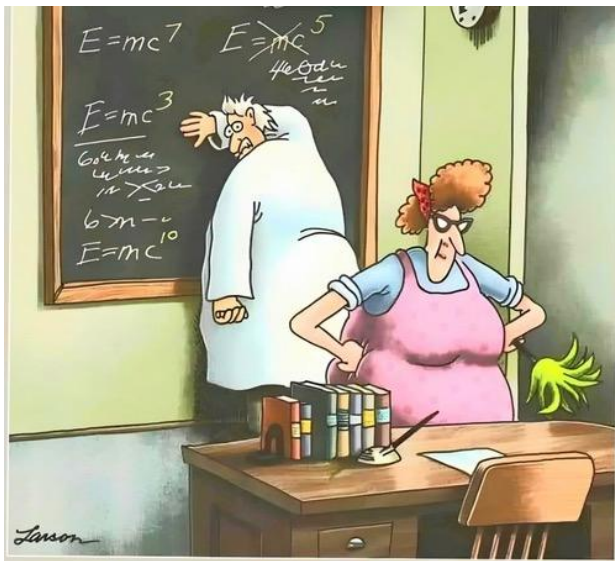
[Walk the Earth is Our Mother Trail at Ganondagan](#) (All Trails map)

Observe Spring Flowers: Many locations in and around the region including Lamberton Conservatory, Sonnenberg Gardens, Buffalo Botanical Gardens, Buffalo Cherry Blossom Festival (late April), Daffodil Meadow at Power Mills Park, Daffodil Meadow at Mount Hope Cemetery, and blooming trees in Highland Park.

[Participate in a Trust Walk](#) Take turns with a partner navigating a safe open space blindfolded.

[Play Jenga with a Group](#) Collaborate on building the tower and then extracting the blocks.

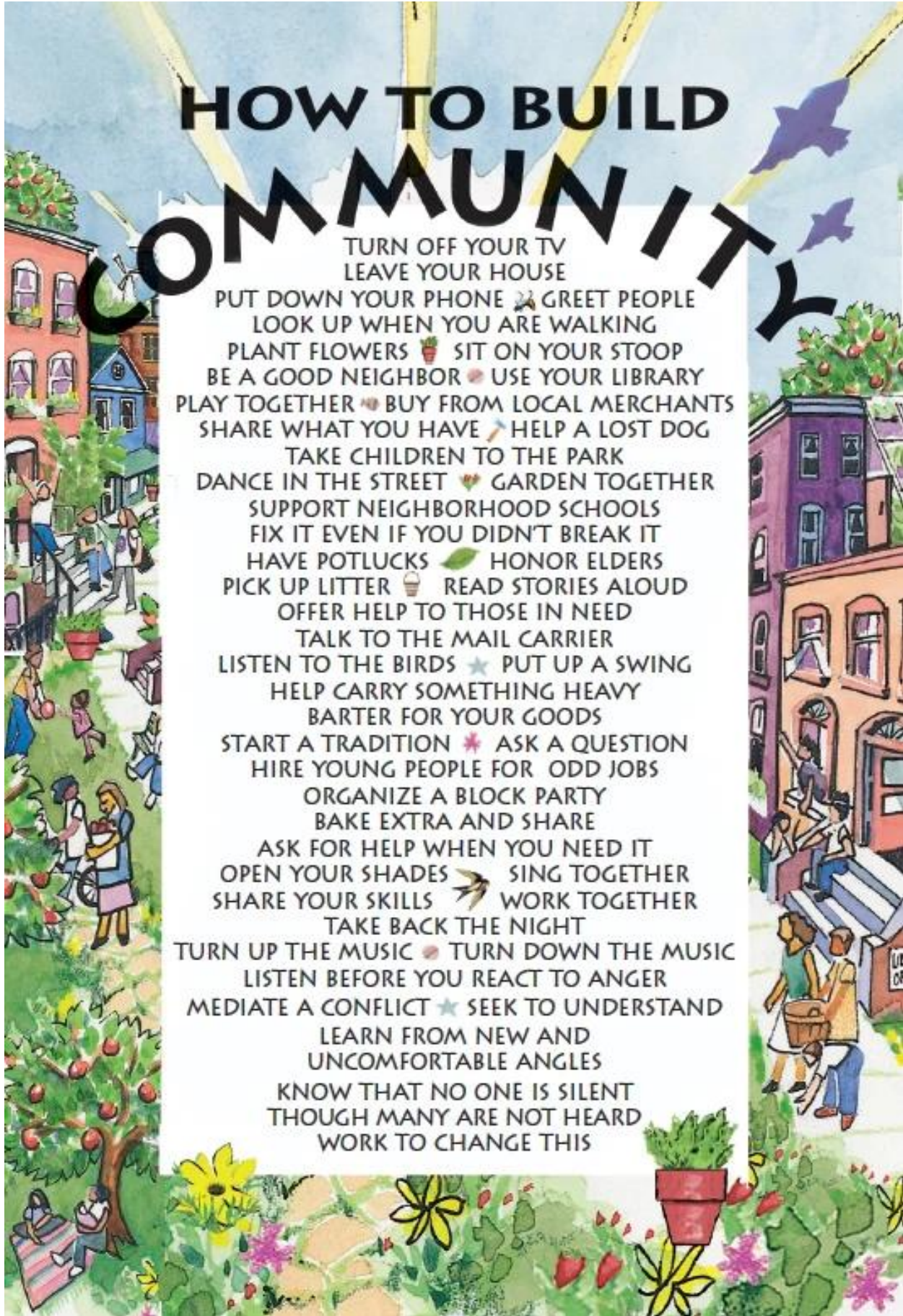
HUMOR



"Now that desk looks better. Everything's squared away, yessir, squaaaaaaared away."



OUR GRATITUDE to the Muddy Season's packet-team leads, Amy Stockwell & Suzy Farrell, the three-church worship brainstorm team, and numerous contributions from the entire packet team. We hope you find inspiration to explore what interdependence means for you and your community.



HOW TO BUILD

COMMUNITY

- TURN OFF YOUR TV
- LEAVE YOUR HOUSE
- PUT DOWN YOUR PHONE 📵 GREET PEOPLE
- LOOK UP WHEN YOU ARE WALKING
- PLANT FLOWERS 🌻 SIT ON YOUR STOOP
- BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR 🏡 USE YOUR LIBRARY
- PLAY TOGETHER 🎮 BUY FROM LOCAL MERCHANTS
- SHARE WHAT YOU HAVE 🍷 HELP A LOST DOG
- TAKE CHILDREN TO THE PARK
- DANCE IN THE STREET 🎶 GARDEN TOGETHER
- SUPPORT NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS
- FIX IT EVEN IF YOU DIDN'T BREAK IT
- HAVE POTLUCKS 🍃 HONOR ELDERS
- PICK UP LITTER 🗑️ READ STORIES ALOUD
- OFFER HELP TO THOSE IN NEED
- TALK TO THE MAIL CARRIER
- LISTEN TO THE BIRDS ⭐ PUT UP A SWING
- HELP CARRY SOMETHING HEAVY
- BARTER FOR YOUR GOODS
- START A TRADITION 🌸 ASK A QUESTION
- HIRE YOUNG PEOPLE FOR ODD JOBS
- ORGANIZE A BLOCK PARTY
- BAKE EXTRA AND SHARE
- ASK FOR HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT
- OPEN YOUR SHADES 🐦 SING TOGETHER
- SHARE YOUR SKILLS 🗝️ WORK TOGETHER
- TAKE BACK THE NIGHT
- TURN UP THE MUSIC 🎵 TURN DOWN THE MUSIC
- LISTEN BEFORE YOU REACT TO ANGER
- MEDIATE A CONFLICT ⭐ SEEK TO UNDERSTAND
- LEARN FROM NEW AND UNCOMFORTABLE ANGLES
- KNOW THAT NO ONE IS SILENT
- THOUGH MANY ARE NOT HEARD
- WORK TO CHANGE THIS

Photo Credit: Syracuse Cultural Workers