

"UUFWC's History"
Worship Service for
The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Wayne County
March 29, 2020

The Rev. Jennie Barrington, Interim Minister
Janice Baxstrom, Worship Associate
Sharon Delgadillo, Pianist and Music Director

Welcome and Announcements

JANICE

Opening Words by the Rev. Margaret Weis

REV JENNIE

The Fellowship is not a place; it is a people.

The Fellowship is not only a steeple above the treeline, streets, and cars.
Rather, it is a people proclaiming to the world that
we are here for the work of healing and of justice.

The Fellowship is not walls built stone upon stone, held together by mortar
but rather person, linked with person, linked with person:
all ages and genders and abilities—
a community built on the foundation of reason, faith, and love.

The Fellowship is not just a set of doors open on Sunday morning,
but the commitment day after day, and moment after moment,
of our hearts creaking open the doors of welcome to the possibility of new
experience and radical welcome.

The Fellowship is not simply a building, a steeple, a pew.

The Fellowship is the gathering together of all the people, and experiences,
and fear, and love, and hope in our resilient hearts;
gathering, however we can, to say to the world:
welcome, come in, lay down your heartache, and pick up hope and love.

For the Fellowship is us—each and every one of us—together,
a beacon of hope to this world that so sorely needs it.

Chalice Lighting by Nancy Reid-McKee

Janice

Our community
knows no boundaries.
We are not confined by the physical limits
of walls or, for that matter,
Of what often binds us, restricts us
Holds us back.

We are free-er than we know
When we release ourselves
And each other from expectations
Of what is needed for true community.

We are here
Together in space

I see you.
I hear you
I love you

And I light this chalice
A beacon of this community
Holding us all together.

Here.
Now.

Hymn #123 Spirit of Life

Time for All Ages: "A Lamp in Every Corner"

CHELSEA

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Rev. Jennie

Spoken Blessing and Moment of Silence

Rev. Jennie

This morning we are thinking with loving kindness of all those in our congregation, or known and loved by our congregation, who are in a time of transition, loss, uncertainty, or fear. May their fears be assuaged, their minds be put at ease, and their hearts be comforted. We are mindful of all the Joys, Concerns, Milestones, and Remembrances which remain silent in our hearts. Let us join our hearts together in a moment of silence in contemplation on the joys and concerns of the day. [Pause for a few minutes of silence.] Blessed be.

Offering

Janice

[Video of the Mayfield girls signing, "Put a Little Love in Your Hearts"]

First Reading: "A Time to Talk," by Robert Frost

When a friend calls to me from the road
And slows his horse to a meaning walk,
I don't stand still and look around
On all the hills I haven't hoed,
And shout from where I am, 'What is it?'
No, not as there is a time to talk.
I thrust my hoe in the mellow ground,
Blade-end up and five feet tall,
And plod: I go up to the stone wall
For a friendly visit.

Second Reading, "Before You Know Kindness," by Naomi Shihab Nye REV JENNIE

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be

between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.

You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.

You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

SERMON "Our Fellowship's History"

Rev. Jennie

There's a phrase Unitarian Universalist Religious Educators use-- I have often heard them say, "Start as you mean to continue." By that they mean that, even from the very first organizational conversations and meetings, when we are launching any new class or program or initiative, we should begin in a manner and exhibiting the values that we want to cultivate into everything we do, throughout the duration of that class, program, or initiative, and that we want to ripple out into all of our wider communities.

This morning we are looking at and lifting up our Fellowship's history, in this sermon and, in more detail after this worship service, with our History Timeline Exercise. So please stay tuned to the same Zoom link for that interactive exercise that interim ministers do with congregations. Our Fellowship has a rich history of which we can be rightly proud. I have enjoyed and appreciated learning about it for many months now. And what has especially filled me with a sense of appreciation and awe is how this Fellowship got started, a little over forty-seven years ago, with the advertisement that Lowell Steinbrenner placed in the newspaper, and with the nineteen people --yes, there were only 19 people!-- who were the original charter members. Several of them are still with us today. And they have helped me enormously in learning UFWC's history, as have your excellent staff, and many other members. Those original nineteen people really did "Start as they meant to continue."

Importantly, most of them had children, and they wanted Unitarian Universalist Religious Education for their children. Some of them had been driving up to Akron for that R.E. programming. But that's quite a trek, especially in the winter. Those founding members took the initiative to form a UU congregation here in Wayne County. They wanted to create their own Sunday School classes, and worship services with readings, hymns, accompaniment, and a speaker. They didn't have a building of their own. So they met at the Union Grange Hall in Madisonburg. They also did not have any staff, such as a Church Secretary, janitor, bookkeeper, paid musician, nor Sunday School teachers, nor nursery care workers. And I think that it must be the case that when some people want to start a new church or congregation, they must think to themselves, "Well, who's going to clean the building, who's going to keep track of the membership lists and the mailings, who will we find to accompany hymns for us, and who is going to teach our children and take care of our babies?" But the original group who started this congregation did not expect anyone from outside of their group to take care of things like that for them. They said to themselves: we are the caretakers; it's up to us to take care of our needs, for the Fellowship's facilities, and administration, and cleaning up, and teaching the children, and providing compassionate care to all generations. That's how they started. And that is the culture, ethos, and compassionate care that has continued-- for over forty-seven years.

I noticed that culture and ethos of "We are the Caretakers" right away. Things like setting up tables and chairs, cleaning up, volunteering to teach and to

pitch in, helping with one another's pastoral care needs, fixing things around the building (including the dishwasher), and even putting ice melt on a patch of ice so someone else does not slip-- This Fellowship's members and friends do not view things like that as someone else's problem to shoulder nor to solve. Here, people take initiative and pitch in-- I noticed that right away-- And that ethos has created a culture in which it is, not a chore to pitch in and help, but a companionable pleasure. UFWC today has nearly 200 members, and has a culture and an ethos that is egalitarian, non-hierarchical, democratic, inclusive, and self-reliant-- And that's because it started that way, back in 1972.

That attention and care, from earliest days, for all age groups in and connected to this Fellowship has brought to mind for me the four stages of life in Hindu philosophy. [And if I mispronounce any of these Hindu words, please correct me later!] [This information is from the Hindu American Foundation.] The four stages of Hindu life are called ashramas [u **shraa** muhz]; they provide structure and guidance for daily life. The first stage of life is Brahmacharya [**bram** a chair ia]. "It is the student stage of life, preparing for success in later life. Individuals should also gain religious training, in order to lay the foundation for spiritual practice." Education, for both boys and girls, continues through late teens and early twenties, i.e., through college or vocational training. The second state is called Grihastha [**Gree** has tha]. In this stage, one maintains a home, perhaps has a family, tries to be a supportive family member and a productive member of society. The third stage is Vanaprashtha [Van a **pras** tha]. It's sort of like a retirement to focus on spiritual fulfillment and reflection. It sounds pretty appealing! An individual would start detaching themselves from family life and the pursuit of material ends by moving to the 'forest time' to devote more of their time to spiritual practices, living among other seekers of solace, knowledge, peace, and freedom. Most people have stopped retiring to the forest, instead choosing to spend more time giving back to their communities, as they deepen their spiritual practice... The goal is to devote oneself to spiritual practice with a commitment to selfless service and in pursuit of liberation." The fourth stage is Sannyasa [San **nee** uh **sa**], or renunciation. "Having fulfilled all prior obligations, a person is free to devote themselves entirely to spiritual growth. A sannyasin lives a very simple life, subsisting on a minimum of material possessions and devoting themselves to non-violence. The goal is to attain liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth."

I have long loved the Hindu stages of life as guidance from sacred wisdom. And I especially love it as sacred wisdom for our Fellowship, as the four stages of

Hindu life honor all stages of life equally, as each having ways to contribute and give back, and also each having some need of education, enlightenment, and nurture. In the four stages of Hindu life, as in this Fellowship, children are not of lesser value; middle-school aged youth and teens are not of lesser value; young adults and baby boomers are not of lesser value; nor are our elders of any lesser value than any other age group. We, of all ages in this Fellowship, are here to learn from and to take care of each other. That's sacred work, and it's enlightening and inspiring work. And it's also a whole lot of fun!

I recently experienced that elevated sense of enlightenment, inspiration, and fun at our Fellowship's annual Cocoa House. Our Youth Community takes the lead in creating, scripting, producing, and hosting this annual extravaganza of comedy, song, magic, drama, gymnastics, pageantry, cookies and cocoa, and a live auction. I even won a uniquely special quilt, hand-made by Carol Noel, that commemorates this year's Youth Community and their Cocoa House. There were parents, grandparents, and little ones all performing together. There were youth and adults behind the scenes making everything flow smoothly and on schedule. Steve Berg was a delight as the Auctioneer. He was enjoying himself so much that we all enjoyed ourselves, too. What I saw and felt was everybody supporting everybody. Adults supported our youth; families without young children supported parents and caretakers; the Youth Community supported our littlest ones as they sang, played a musical instrument, told a joke, or performed a magic trick; and the Youth Community supported our littlest ones in the ways that our current Youth Community was supported, only a few years ago, by young people who are now adults, and are now out supporting others in the wider community. No age group was less worthy than any other. All ages were receiving and supporting spiritual nurturance from each other. To have opportunities to take care of and be cared for by all generations is a sacred thing. And it's a model for how communities in the wider world should be.

What if being Caretakers is the Highest work of all?

Let us sing. Please join me in singing together, "We are Building a New Way."

CLOSING HYMN, #1017 BUILDING A NEW WAY

Parting Words by the Rev. Heather Rion Starr

Rev. Jennie

May whatever gatherings or activities we engage in this Sunday afternoon help restore us —
our connections to one another;
our sense of hope, beauty, and fun in this world;
our deep knowing that we have to take care of ourselves and each other with love and joy if we are to soulfully survive the world's mayhem.

Extinguishing the Chalice

Postlude "Unitarian Universalist," by Hal Walker