

Reverence

The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our own faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community. We explore each theme in worship and in our newsletter; in covenant groups, and religious education; and in our community outreach ministries, our literary journal and programs, and many other opportunities.

I began writing this month's article by trying to define reverence, but that proved an impossible task. Google told me it is considered by many to be a virtue, whatever that means. I was also informed it acts as both a noun and a verb and is described in terms of other hard-to-define words like respect, awe, veneration, honor, devotion. What I ended up with after much research is an intangible, an experience that is elusive and ephemeral and difficult to put into words.

Maybe we should approach reverence from a different angle. What are the things that we as Unitarian Universalists revere? And how does that shape who we are and how we are in the world?

It seems to me that we UUs revere the journey rather than the destination, questions rather than answers, relationships based on equity rather than hierarchy, covenant rather than contract; most importantly, we have deep reverence for the Holy (however that may be defined) within, among and beyond each aspect of Creation, including ourselves.

It is our reverence of these things that reminds us of our place within the interconnected web. In opening ourselves to awe of the Mystery, respect for curiosity, and devotion to justice we begin to realize both our smallness within the larger story and our unique gifts to offer in the unfolding. It is from this place of humility and awareness that we can *choose* reverence. We can intentionally bow our heads at the majesty that surrounds us; and we

can deliberately stand tall to honor the beauty of adding our voices in harmony to the Song that is always being sung.

And it is this choice, this *intention* of reverence that makes all the difference. As Irish priest and author, John O'Donohue says, "What you encounter, recognize or discover depends to a large degree on the quality of your approach. When we approach with reverence, great things decide to approach us. Our real life comes to the surface and its light awakens the concealed beauty in things. When we walk on the earth with reverence, beauty will decide to trust us. The rushed heart and arrogant mind lack the gentleness and patience to enter that embrace."

By living into our UU principles moment by moment we refine our approach to Life and cultivate our capacity for reverence. It's like doing all the prep work so that when a sudden moment of awe arrives our hearts recognize it and we can choose to open our souls to the beauty, the harmony, to that which is larger than ourselves. When we approach the search with reverence, great truths and depths of meaning will be revealed to us. When we behold *all* of our fellow human beings with reverence, we will be blinded by the light that dwells within, and justice, equity, and compassion are sure to follow. When we aspire to live in a beloved community held in reverence, we will naturally work together towards spiritual and intellectual growth, turning our world towards greater peace, freedom, and love.

So, however you define reverence, whatever you understand it to be, take this month to consider when and where you approach life in this way. Spend some time thinking about what it is you revere and how that prepares you to experience and embrace sacred moments, wherever and whenever they may happen.

By Shay MacKay
with this month's theme team:
Janne Eller-Isaacs, Rob Eller-Isaacs,
Karen Hering, K.P. Hong,
Lisa Friedman and Danny Givens

Reverence Theme Resources

Books

A Haunting Reverence by Kent Nerburn

Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue by Paul Woodruff

Out of Africa by Isak Dinesen

Dream Work by Mary Oliver

Beauty: The Invisible Embrace by John O'Donohue

Film

Simon Birch (1998)

Contact (1997)

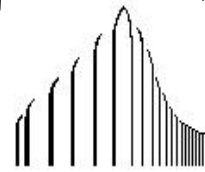
Baraka (1992) and *Samsara* (2011)

Youth

Wangari's Trees of Peace by Jeanette Winter

In God's Name by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso

Miss Rumphius by Barbara Cooney



Grace

The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our own faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community. We explore each theme in worship and in our newsletter; in covenant groups, and religious education; and in our community outreach ministries, our literary journal and programs, and many other opportunities.

There but for the grace of God go I.

But you. You stay over there, with your bad luck. I have been spared, but you...well, you just do what you can to survive this unfortunate twist of fate. But try to do it gracefully, ok? It's not necessary to whine and moan about it. I'll keep you in my prayers — obviously God favors me, at the moment. And from over here I'll admire how serenely you deal with things. Look how you surrender. It's the only way, really. Submission is your only saving grace. Sure, I'll comfort you; grace you with my presence during this time of trouble. But just... just take it all with good grace, OK? There's really nothing you or I can do about it, and I don't want to have to feel guilty or anything.

Black bodies. See how they acquiesce, go where we put them, do what we tell them. Obedient. Submissive. They move through this life (when we tell them they can) with such a quiet grace. Good men and women of God, graced with athletic talent, beautiful singing voices, strong backs for us to exploit.

Female bodies. Petite. Fragile. Painted, smoothed, carved and forced into a beauty of form. Moving with such a delicate, innate grace. Look how she walks in those heels, the graceful sway of her hips. Such fragile grace in the prominence of the collar bone. But that face needs some work, the sweet smile is her only saving grace. No worries — a little nip here and tuck there, cheekbones, nose, chin. Paint the lips, it will bring out the blue of her eyes. Straighten and whiten the teeth; the smile's nice, but...

Animal bodies. Floral and faunal bodies. Nature is full of beauty and grace. The graceful gait of the tiger. The graceful, towering height of the

redwood. The graceful tranquility of ivory. The graceful flight of the golden eagle. The graceful swell of sound as the tide comes in and the graceful twinkle of the stars overhead — when we can see them through the light pollution and smog. The graceful melting flow of the glaciers. The graceful song of the last of the humpback whales. The graceful journey of the salmon upstream — until they reach the dam. Damn, that oil spill delivered the coup de grace to the survival of the shorebirds' nesting habitat and the sea turtles' spawning grounds and the dolphins' food supply.

There but for the grace of God go I.

Go I. Through the corruption, destruction, pollution, persecution, oppression, depression, suggestion, correction, deception, discrimination, separation, disconnection. I go. Gracefully. Because what other choice do I have?

But wait.

Wait.

You keep using that word — grace. I do not think it means what you think it means.

True grace is the antithesis of all that has been said, of all we have learned it to be. True grace is an *invitation*. An invitation to thrive; an opportunity that we must be willing to receive, and that requires us to open our hearts and eyes to see the reality of what is happening.

True grace is wild and unpredictable. It explodes our expectations, crumbles our defenses, pushes past our boundaries and moves beyond anything our minds can imagine.

True grace is prophetic, calling us toward Truth. It is revelatory and redemptive, but only so far as we are

willing to let go of “self” and “other” and surrender to Oneness.

True grace is a reward and a gift, yes, but one that is always present if we can only learn to tune in to the synchronicity, the syncretism, the syncopation and rhythm of life. And it is a gift that we, too, can give. An invitation that we can extend. A wildness that we can encourage.

True grace is profound and sacred, and yet...

It is real. It is here. In every opportunity for connection. In every careful decision. In every moment of appreciation. It is in my body in all its imperfect beauty. It is in the anger of every black man and woman who refuses to remain silent any longer. It is in the resiliency of this earth, which will go on long after we humans do all we can to destroy her. It is mine, but it is also yours.

True grace is ours, if we choose to accept it.

By Shay MacKay with this month's theme team: Karen Hering, Karen Hutt, Janne Eller-Isaacs, Rob Eller-Isaacs, KP Hong, Ruth Palmer

Grace Theme Resources

Books

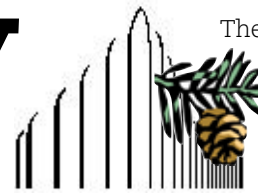
Beloved by Toni Morrison
Godless Grace by Orenstein and Blaikie
Grace Eventually by Anne Lamott
About Grace by Anthony Doerr
Ram Dass: *Fierce Grace* (2001)

Film

Amelie (2001)
Good Will Hunting (1997)
Amazing Grace (2006)

Youth

Holes (2003 film)
The Red Balloon (1956 film)



Waiting

The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our own faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community. We explore each theme in worship and in our newsletter; in covenant groups, and religious education; and in our community outreach ministries, our literary journal and programs, and many other opportunities.

I write this 48 hours after 129 people were killed in Paris, 48 hours after 19 people were murdered in Baghdad, 72 hours after 43 people were blown up in Beirut, and as I write each word more lives are being destroyed by violence somewhere. Everywhere.

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope.

I write this only hours after Jamar Clark was shot in the head by police officers at the intersection of James and Plymouth. I write this in the eleventh month of a year in which 21 transwomen have been murdered in the U.S. I write this as hundreds and thousands of desperate refugees continue to drown, suffocate, starve to death.

Jamar Clark. Michael Brown. Tamir Rice. Romain Brisbon. Zella Ziona. Keisha Jenkins. Kajieme Powell. Yvette Smith. Aylan Kurdi. Ezell Ford. Eric Garner. Jasmine Collins. Gabriel Sanchez Velasquez.

Wait without hope, for hope would be hope for the wrong thing.

But *what* are we waiting for? We speak of truth. We speak of justice. Are these our most fervent hopes?

Wait without love, for love would be love of the wrong thing.

What are we waiting for? We speak of beloved community. We speak of interconnectedness. Are these the things our hearts long for?

I said to my soul, be still, and wait.

What are we waiting for??

You say I am repeating something I have said before. I shall say it again. Shall I say it again? In order to arrive there, to arrive where you are, to get from where you are not, you must go

by a way wherein there is no ecstasy. In order to arrive at what you do not know you must go by a way which is the way of ignorance. In order to arrive at what you are not you must go through the way in which you are not.

Perhaps we can't know what it is we hope for, what it is we love the most. Perhaps we won't see the birthing of a world of equity, liberty, and peace in this lifetime. Maybe we'll never see it. So we wait.

Do we wait for a savior? Do we wait for a judgment day? A revelation? A redemption?

No. We are our own redeemers. Let us remember that we are Unitarians, believing in the inherent worth and dignity of all human beings — *this* is how we love. Let us remember that we are Universalists, believing that all human beings can and will be restored to right relationship with each other and all of creation — *this* is our hope. But we must also remind ourselves that systemic, universal change happens slowly. These hopes we have, these loves we hold, these truths we seek take time.

But in the waiting we are not idle! We *cannot* be idle. In the waiting we have important work to do. We must reflect, remember, recover *who we are* and *who we are not*. In the waiting we are given time to confess and repent, to forgive and heal, to gather our strength and courage for all that is yet to come. In the waiting we prepare and plan, queue up resources, hone our skills, negotiate connections and do everything — *everything* — we can to ensure continued work and the eventual (hopefully?) success of an outcome we cannot imagine and will never see.

So what are we waiting for? There is much work to be done. Much work to be done while we wait.

I said to my soul, be still, and wait. There is yet faith, but the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.

There is yet faith. I have faith that while we wait for violence, greed, anger and fear to stop controlling the world we will do all that we can to ensure that it may be so. May it be so.

(The phrases in italics throughout this piece are taken from T.S. Eliot's poem "East Coker", from *The Four Quartets*.)

By Hallman Ministerial Intern
Shay MacKay with this month's theme team: Lisa Friedman, Ruth Palmer, KP Hong, Karen Hering, Rob Eller-Isaacs, Janne Eller-Isaacs and Danny Givens, Jr.

Waiting Theme Resources

BOOKS

When the Heart Waits by Sue Monk Kidd

The Four Quartets by T.S. Eliot

Poem: "I Am Waiting" by Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Seven Spiritual Gifts of Waiting by Holly W. Whitcomb

A Feminist Ethic of Risk by Sharon Welch

FILM

Pursuit of Happyness (2006)

The Fountain (2006)

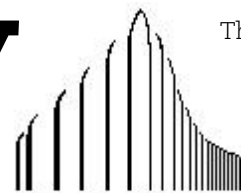
YOUTH

The Snowman (1982 film)

book by Raymond Briggs

Waiting by Kevin Henkes

Waiting is Not Easy! by Mo Willems



AUTHORITY

The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our own faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community. We explore each theme in worship and in our newsletter; in covenant groups, and religious education; and in our community outreach ministries, our literary journal and programs, and many other opportunities.

It seems to me that when we talk about authority what we're really talking about is trust. And not an easy trust or a simple trust, but trust that is enigmatic and paradoxical. A trust in both a grasp of power and a submission to something bigger than ourselves. A trust in both pride and humility. A trust in both wisdom and ignorance.

Not only that, but authority also inherently creates "other"; there must be a source or agent of authority and a someone(s) receiving, responding, submitting, or serving. In a time when we are increasingly distrustful of binaries and dichotomies, authority becomes even harder to swallow.

And the sad truth is that so many of us have had our trust betrayed over and over again — broken promises, abuses of power, boldfaced lies, and subtle oppressions from religious leaders, politicians, teachers, parents, bosses, etc.

I'm sorry for all the scars we bear, both personally and communally. It's no wonder, really, that so many of us who call ourselves Unitarian Universalists have tentatively come here after running from other religions. It's no wonder that the younger generations require their leaders to *earn* their authority rather than be followed dutifully because of age or status or money. And it's no wonder that it can feel so hard to claim our own authority, to voice even our deepest convictions, for fear of joining the ranks of those who have over-used and abused such things.

And yet...

Leonardo DaVinci said, "Nothing strengthens authority so much as silence." We are constantly being told by our leaders, our ministers, our prophets that the voice of liberal religion *must* be heard in today's world; that

our message is not only important, but imperative as counterpoint to voices of oppressive, abusive authority that seem to control our society.

This seems to serve us well as Unitarian Universalists, in our fight against traditional forms of authority, in our call to justice and truth. Everybody knows that UUs have trouble with authority, right? I mean, it's one of the main threads running through our history, from the moment Michael Servetus dared to write a book challenging the authority of the dominant religious teachings and was burned at the stake. We descend from a long line of men and women who refused to remain silent about their beliefs, instead finding within themselves a personal conviction urging them toward greater truth.

Yes, authority can be scary. So much so that even claiming our own can be very difficult. But there *are* things in which we've learned we can trust. In fact, our religious tradition has identified several sources of authority in which we can depend: direct experience of mystery, words and deeds of prophetic men and women that have come before us, wisdom from the world's religions including our Judeo-Christian heritage, humanist teachings, and spiritual teachings of the myriad of Earth-centered traditions that have existed for thousands of years.

We're also learning, at least I hope we are, that the wisest and most powerful authority is that of the Love that binds us together in beloved community. There's a delicate balance to be found between our individual experiences and convictions and our collective values and visions, but if we trust in the both/and of that tension our fear and hesitation will be replaced by humble audacity to speak and act toward a shared vision.

So, yes. In response to Davinci's claim that our silence allows unhealthy authority to gain power and control, we must speak loudly and often with our own authority. But I wonder, if we look at his words with different emphasis, if there's another message there for us. What if what he was really saying was that nothing strengthens our own inner authority so much as silence — taking the time to be quiet and let the still, small voice within speak?

Because in order to stand up and make our voices heard in this world, we need to know what it is we want to say.

By Hallman Ministerial Intern
Shay MacKay with this month's theme
team: Rob Eller-Isaacs, Janne Eller-Isaacs,
Ruth Palmer, KP Hong,
Lisa Friedman, and Karen Hering

AUTHORITY THEME RESOURCES

BOOKS

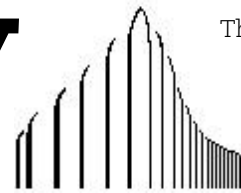
1984 by George Orwell
Essay: Our Responsibility in Society
by James Luther Adams
A Way of Being Free by Ben Okri
Ethics of Authenticity by Charles Taylor
"Choose Your Own Adventure: A
Conversation with Jennifer Egan
and George Saunders" in *The New
York Times Magazine*: <http://nyti.ms/1HCFmiv>

FILM

V for Vendetta (2005)
Spotlight (2015)
Eyes on the Prize (1987 PBS
documentary)

YOUTH

Click Clack Moo: Cows That Type
by Doreen Cronin
Eat Your Peas by Kes Gray



Compassion

The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our own faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community. We explore each theme in worship and in our newsletter; in covenant groups, and religious education; and in our community outreach ministries, our literary journal and programs, and many other opportunities.

We talked with each other about each other, though neither of us spoke. ~ Emily Dickinson

I was asked once how it feels to receive compassion. After a moment of thought, I responded with, "It is an experience of being fully seen and heard."

There are many ways I could write about compassion; many angles from which to approach this topic. I could tell you all the reasons it's important to approach the world from a place of compassion. I could give you multiple spiritual practices to help you cultivate compassion in yourself.

But what I really want to do is ask you the same question I was asked.

How does it feel — how *do you feel* — when you are the recipient of true compassion?

Think about that. It's ok. I'll wait here while you take a moment.

Does it make you feel good? Do you feel warm, safe, loved? Do you feel understood, heard, held? Do you feel seen? Maybe, for just a moment, do you feel not alone?

In Latin — *compati*. Com = together. Pati = to suffer. To suffer together.

I want to expand my answer to the question. To receive compassion is to feel that someone else is fully present with me and willing to stay, no matter what is happening. No matter what.

And while that can be comforting, it can also be scary. Because it means that I am being fully seen and heard while at my most vulnerable. In my brokenness, in my woundedness, in my *suffering* someone else is right there — not just observing, not just supporting, but really *being* with me, truly knowing me in that frightening place.

I could tell you that compassion can feel impossible to give sometimes. Instead, I'm going to tell you that compassion can feel really hard to receive sometimes. I'm also going to tell you that it's important for you to learn how to receive it. Because that's how you nurture the ability to give it.

Christina Feldman, in her book *Compassion*, says, "learning to nurture a heart without boundaries is truly a journey that asks for profound understanding, receptivity, and courage."

Compassion, whether giving or receiving, erases the illusion of *other*. We have to be willing to let go of any ideas of separateness, any misconceptions about which suffering is ours or which children are ours or which anger, betrayal, fear, despair are ours. No boundaries. We have to understand that we are all one. We have to be open to whatever is and whatever will be. And we have to be brave.

I feel like I ask you to be brave a lot. And you are. You are beautiful, loving, courageous, beloved people in covenant with yourselves, with each other, with your world. And you're not doing anything wrong.

We UU's can be full of compassion, especially for the suffering we perceive happening beyond our church walls. And we here at Unity Church hold great depths of compassion for those among us who are struggling or sad.

We're not always so good about opening ourselves up, letting others know we are hurting, and receiving the blast of love that would surely come our way if we did. We're not always so

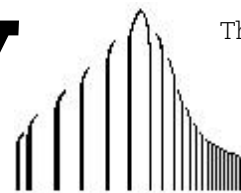
good about being brave enough to let ourselves truly be seen and heard, be held, be known. And yes, sometimes when we do open up and reach out we don't receive what we're hoping for or needing or expecting, and so it takes even more courage to try again and trust that it's worth it — and practice using that as an opportunity for self-compassion.

So I encourage you, my friends. I pray that you find the courage to practice nurturing hearts without boundaries, to practice allowing a compassionate companion along on your most frightening journeys (even if that companion is you), to practice letting go of the illusion that you are all alone — or that you have to suffer in silence and secrecy.

And if you are brave enough to do this — even just sometimes — and if you are open to receiving the love and comfort and connection that compassion offers, then understanding and wisdom will naturally follow. And from there your own capacity for compassion for another will grow and you will begin to learn about each other without ever having to speak.

Hallman Ministerial Intern Shay MacKay
with this month's theme team:
KP Hong, Rob Eller-Isaacs, Lisa Friedman

Compassion Theme Resources
See page 2



Transcendence

Transcendence Theme Resources, see page 2

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I don't have any answers for you today. Just questions.

In the theme team's conversation on transcendence, one of our ministers said something like this: Moments of transcendence occur when we break past the particular and merge into the universal.

Let's break transcendence down into the experience of ecstasy — particularly, collective ecstasy.

Ecstasy comes from the ancient Greek *extasis*, which figuratively means "to be outside of where you usually are." In Greek philosophy it came to mean moments when a door opens in your mind or soul, you feel an expanded sense of being, an intense feeling of joy or euphoria, and you feel connected to something larger than yourself.

Have you ever had that feeling when you are in a worship service at church? How about at a stadium for a baseball game? At a theater for a concert? In the audience of a lecture?

How about on the street at a Black Lives Matter rally?

Collective ecstasy — moving past the particulars of each individual and merging into the universal of the crowd and the experience. This is an experience most of us yearn for, and will search for years to find. It is an experience religions have encouraged for millennia — the loss of self into union of the One. In some ways, you could argue, it is the experience of overcoming physical and cultural differences in pursuit of connection at a more universal, divine level.

So, then, what does this mean as we try to be in right relationship with communities of color?

And what do we do with the growing number of researchers and activists and sociologists that are telling us we need to develop beyond minimization into true

understanding and acknowledgment of our diversity?

Let me give you a little context for these questions.

Last weekend, I attended a fabulous, eye-opening, heart-breaking workshop on intercultural competence. Unity's Board of Trustees, Executive Team, and several other representatives from teams throughout the church were also attending — I guarantee you'll hear more about it in the next few months.

Intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures. Current research clearly identifies intercultural competence as a key capability for working and living effectively with people from different cultures. Research also indicates that all of us are located on an intercultural development continuum — a set of six mindsets, or orientations, toward cultural difference and commonality.

I can't go into this in too much depth within my word limit for this article, so I'll refer you to Google for further reading, however, I do want to talk about minimization.

Minimization is the transitional mindset between the more mono-cultural orientations at one end of the continuum and the more intercultural world views at the other. Around 68% of people are in minimization. That's a lot.

Here's the essence of the minimization mindset: Minimization is when we level differences between different cultures. We tend to highlight commonalities in both basic human needs and universal values and principles. "We're all human after all and things like respect and hard work mean the same thing for everybody, wherever they come from." Minimization shows the desire to move beyond judgment, but it negates the value of diversity.

At first glance, our UU theology, especially the Universalism part of it, can appear to actually encourage us toward minimization. We believe that religion is a universal human quality, tend to emphasize the universal principles of most religions in an inclusive manner, and profess faith in a universal reconciliation between humanity and the divine.

In addition, our first principle puts every single person on equal footing in their inherent worth and dignity.

Finally, our striving toward Beloved Community, in which "racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of humanity," can give the impression that we are trying to live beyond diversity into human commonality.

Minimization is only the mid-point on the Intercultural Development continuum. Theoretically, the hope is that we will move past it into the mindsets of Acceptance and Adaptation, in which we are recognizing patterns of cultural difference, acknowledging the complexity of all humans, respecting differences, and obtaining the ability to shift our cultural perspectives and change our behaviors in authentic and culturally appropriate ways.

So, does our theology actually encourage us to stay in minimization or are we using that theology as a convenient excuse to not do the developmental work we need to do?

Do our experiences of transcendence erase the differences between us or enhance them?

I warned you — I have no answers. I'm just wondering...

Hallman Ministerial Intern Shay MacKay with this month theme team:
Janne Eller-Isaacs, Rob Eller-Isaacs, Lisa Friedman, Karen Hering, KP Hong