

Spring 2021

Grace Notes

The Quarterly Journal of First Unitarian Universalist Church



Spring UU Themes

April ~ Becoming

May ~ Story

From the Minister

Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer



*No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.
This is what we are about.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way.
We are prophets of a future not our own.*

~Bishop Ken Utener, in honor of Bishop Oscar Romero

I love the phrase a “future not our own.” These words were written to honor Bp. Oscar Romero, a priest and worker for liberation of the poor and oppressed, who was killed by authorities because of that work. His whole life’s work, and the larger movement of which he was one part, was about planting seeds without knowing what would come.

That feels like our work most of the time, and perhaps in more poignant ways in these pandemic days. We are still navigating our way between hope and despair, hesitation and possibility, planting seeds, watering seeds, not knowing what will come, or become of it all.

Perhaps that is the hardest, and most liberating part of our faith: incompleteness. The fact that we cannot do everything, fix everything, accomplish everything - as excruciating as it can feel – might be the most important thing that Universalism, and any good religion, can teach us. That realization can free us to do what we can, in all the ways we can, knowing that we are one part in the long arc of justice and love. It is a humble reminder that as important as our individual work for liberation is, we are always in a process of becoming. It means that our collective liberation, like our traditional theology of Universal Salvation, is always a work in progress.

Moving into whatever comes next – for our world, for this church, for our own lives – is a work in progress. The well-being and flourishing of our own heart, let alone the world, rarely happens suddenly, and never in complete finished fullness. And yet, it seems, each small thing we can do – each little seed – can bring life to one small corner of the world, one small corner of our soul. And I believe that the possibility of bringing life to one small corner is worth the effort of planting the seed.

In Faith,
Rev. Luke

From the Board

Kim Reid - Vice President

This year the pandemic has brought many different ways of “doing” school for my fifth-grade class. In early March all the students finally returned to the classroom – it was the first time this year that I had all my students together in one place. On that first day when we all gathered in the classroom, one of my students looked around the full classroom and said, “I haven’t been in a room with this many people in a year. This is making me a little anxious!”

We successfully navigated those first days and weeks back together as a class. The joy we feel in being together has lessened the anxiety for all of us, but we still do school differently than we did before. Desks are now separated by the required number of feet, and we always use masks/face shields. Virtual high-fives have replaced hugs. I no longer crouch down and lean in to whisper something to a student. Instead, I gather students in small groups where we are separated by plastic sneeze shields. Some of the changes we have experienced are challenging, but others are beneficial. We’ve been pushed into trying different things and have learned some new and better ways to be together as a group of learners.



I remember back in March 2020 when it was predicted that we would need to be at home for about eight weeks. (Ha!!) At church many of the groups paused their work, expecting to pick it back up sometime soon. As it became clear that our separation would last much longer, we found different ways to gather for committee work, social activities, shared ministry, and exploring our building’s future. We even held a successful annual auction! Over the past year we have learned new ways of being together as a church family. Some changes have been required due to the pandemic, but others have been intentional work that has continued despite a virus that keeps us all at home.

We don’t know yet when our church family can gather together again or what that will look like, but I imagine that we will undergo an experience similar to the one my students and I have had in the last month. As we begin planning for a return to our church building, there will be some anxiety just as there was in my classroom during those first days together. Some may be ready to gather right away; others may wish to stay distanced for a while longer. We are likely to find that we do some things differently than we did before. Change – even good change – can be hard, and it will be important that we go through the experience of coming back together with kindness, grace, and generosity.

I am so looking forward to the opportunity to regather and excited to see what we become.

The Virtual Choir Experience: Technology, Talent, Confidence, Humility, and Deadlines

Joe Mish, Co- Director of Music & Choir Director



The virtual choir will never replace live music or a real choir, but the same sort of focus and intent and esprit de corps is evident in both, and at the end of the day it seems to me a genuine artistic expression. — Eric Whitacre

Just over a year ago, singing together quite suddenly became a health risk. Like much of church life, the Covid-19 pandemic disturbed the status quo of our adult choir, the Walden Hill Vocal Ensemble. At this time last April, we really had no idea how to keep a choir going during the pandemic or how long our suspension of choir performances and rehearsals would be and we were hoping that it might be better come fall. HA - I guess we know better now.

As it became evident we weren't getting back to "normal" anytime soon, I began researching and learning how to do Zoom choir. My experiences as an orchestra teacher were good practice, but I realized there was a steep learning curve to getting the choir onto your screens for our online services. I also quickly learned that it takes a lot more time to put a choir piece together virtually than it does in person. Our choir members, too, have learned that it's not as easy as it looks. As tenor Peter Edl states, "This has been an interesting, challenging, and frustrating year. I am happy that we as a choir have been able to contribute to the life of the church and some of the services. That part has been stimulating and challenging at the same time. The actual mechanics of putting together a single voice submission to the virtual ensemble can present a few challenges, from deciding what platform to use for recording to converting accompaniment and learning tracks to a sound format that works with my chosen "second device" to actually putting together a passable recording to upload. All in all I think it has worked all right and the assembled voices in the virtual choir sound pretty good."

Fortunately for our congregation, we've been able to field a choir throughout the year. I'm so proud of the seven pieces we've put together this year and look forward to hopefully just "one" more to execute in April. We've all learned a great deal along the way. As Jodi Edmonson shared, "I am so grateful that Joe has found a way to keep the choir together virtually and that the church has supported it financially. I am also grateful that my husband (and tenor Dave) handled the technology required at our end. I miss choir members who haven't been able to participate because of the technology required." These kinds of performances are not for everyone; they are musically and technologically challenging.

I should mention that we've had some good help. First a shout out to Austin Ferguson, our still new accompanist and co-director of music, who still hasn't been able to enjoy a normal in-person rehearsal. He handles the piano and organ, while I do my best to manage Zoom and try to remember to mute myself when he's playing. And another shout out to Izzy Hyman, whose video production and communication skills are second to none. If you've watched any UUA-produced music - from last year's General Assembly or from the last service we aired in February - you've seen his work. We record ourselves and upload the videos, and then he mixes our voices and puts our faces in our boxes. He also has provided some great instructions that make our tasks easier. Janine Van Ree shared, "It was definitely intimidating to make the first recording of myself and hard to be satisfied with the result. If you just hear your voice without the other voices, it doesn't sound as good. But then magic happens when Izzy puts all the voices together."

It takes talent, confidence, humility, and adherence to deadlines to record yourself. Even though choir members sing along with an audio track, it's not the same as blending within your section. "Virtual choir has made it possible for congregants to participate not just as consumers but also as producers of the church experience." Phil Wheeler continues, "After recording several efforts, I finally end up realizing that deadlines are a good thing, and that I shouldn't let 'perfect' be the enemy of 'barely adequate.' There apparently is a reason I'm not a soloist." Don't let Phil's modesty fool you, we have some great solo voices in our choir.



So how to sum up our virtual Walden Hill Vocal Ensemble's work this year? I'll leave you with a few more choir members' quotes.

I love how WHVE rehearsals give some normalcy to this crazy COVID life. I have somewhere to be at 6 pm every Wednesday night. I get to see my friends, laugh at all Joe's jokes (both Joes) and find solace in singing. Another perk is that I get to see my daughter who is participating from New York. Rehearsals are truly a highlight of the week. — Janine Van Ree

I've loved being able to see and sing with fellow choir members, even in the challenging Zoom environment. It has helped keep me connected to the church and I've felt gratified in being able to participate in church services, even in this minor way! — Joe Lobl

I miss my "real" choir experience, where I can just lose myself in the music and sing with abandon with a live director and accompanist. While I can't be certain I always sound as good as I imagine I should, there is something magical that happens when we sing as a group. And I miss that the most. — Peter Edl

You all summed it up best for me, and Peter is right: we can't wait for the magic to return outside in the courtyard, masked and distanced, but together in person, voice, and spirit. You'll know where to find us on Wednesdays at six in the evening (weather permitting of course).

Visit our YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIHDXIG7FUAhZY0TNBI_Mwg/) and watch the virtual choir sing these songs:

November 1, 2020 - "Wanting Memories"

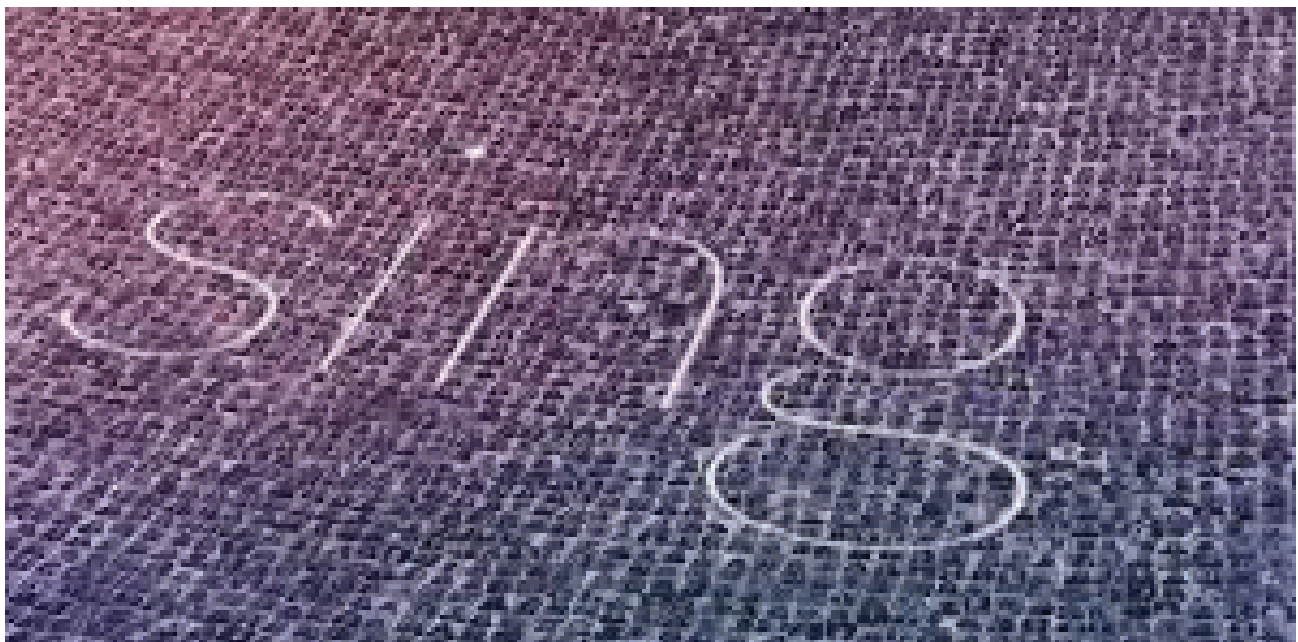
November 22, 2020 - "Gather in Thanks"

December 24, 2020 - "Personent Hodie"

January 17, 2021 - "Answering the Call"

March 7, 2021 - "Do Not Leave Your Cares at the Door"

March 28, 2021 - "Inscription of Hope"



Chalice Camp is BACK!

After having to take a year off due to, well, you know – Chalice Camp is back and we are ready to create some magic.

Now, let me introduce you to The Univelarian University of Wizarding Arts! Or UUWA (pronounced Yooou-Waah) What is UUWA? It is a wizarding program that can be held virtually or in-person, rooted in values of justice, action, unity, worth, courage, and possibility.

We will have 4 multiage houses rooted in the virtues of Hope, Faith, Truth, and Love. Sorting will happen on Monday. There will also be classes each day for students (grouped by age) that will focus on the Five Jagged Rocks of Liberal Religion – Unity, Worth, Action, Courage, and Possibility.

Of course, as with all things since COVID, there will be some differences at Chalice Camp this summer. We will be outside as much as possible and continue safety practices like mask wearing, hand washing, and physical distancing. Students will also have their own kits for each day, as we will be limiting the amount of shared materials. The good news about this is that we can offer our camp to those who may not feel comfortable meeting in person.

Being safe also means our unique snack plates will not be possible this year, and neither will our overnight. HOWEVER, we are hoping that we will be able to start some new traditions like a Wednesday night gathering and a stuffy sleepover. The bottom line is, we are so pleased to welcome our UU kids back to the building this summer!

Registration is open for all campers ages 4-12 (entering PreK-7th Grade) at [Camper Registration](https://dre.uurochmn.org) or contact Amy Nelson, Director of Faith Development, at dre.uurochmn.org.

Applications for counselors (13+, entering 8th grade+) will be coming out soon.

Camp will be Monday, July 12, through Friday, July 16, from 9 am to 4 pm. Cost is \$150 for the first camper, \$100 for each additional camper. Extended hours of 8 am to 5 pm are available for a suggested donation of \$25/child. Scholarships are available, and no camper will be turned away for inability to pay.



Thanks to a unique opportunity, I am working with other UU congregations across the US to create this unique day camp experience. It has been a wonderful opportunity for me to collaborate with other Directors of Faith Development. We hope to have a virtual meeting with other UU congregations during the week of camp. It is important for our UU kids to know that there are UUs all over!

I would be remiss to not mention the fact that, while modeled on the Harry Potter book series, this is a unique curriculum created by UU Directors of Faith Development for our UU kids. Additionally, in light of JK Rowling's position on womxn, the creators of UUWA share the following ~

As a Unitarian Universalist program, UUWA affirms that all people of all genders are whole, holy, and good. We completely and totally refute the TERF (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist) opinions of the author of the Harry Potter books. At the School of Wizardry, we seek to build a community which honors the wizard-loving identities of our students and faculty while also firmly upholding a tradition of inclusion and acceptance. We acknowledge that the books and movies in the Harry Potter franchise have always been problematic, with issues of racism, fat phobia, anti-Semitism and more. Our program reimagines the Wizarding World to uphold our Unitarian Universalist Principles.

For further explanation, please see this article by [Aja Romano](#).



2021 DISTANCE LEARNING

UUWA

UNIVELARIAN UNIVERSITY OF WIZARDING ARTS

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

JULY 12 - 16

9am to 4pm - extended hours available

\$150 FIRST STUDENT, \$100 ADDITIONAL STUDENTS

PLEASE EMAIL FOR MORE INFO:

dre@uurochmn.org

First UU Spring Activities

Spring at First UU means more opportunities to gather together outdoors and virtually. Watch your eNews or contact the office (office@uurochmn.org) for more information. Here is a small list of expected events:

- **Peter Mayer Live Online Concert** via Zoom - Saturday, April 10, at 7:00 pm
- **Tailgate and Courtyard Coffee Hour** - beginning Sunday, April 11, from 10:30 -11:15 am
Space is limited. Watch your eNews for sign-up information.
- **Family Park Days** - Contact Amy Nelson, Director of Faith Development (dre@uurochmn.org) for more information.
- **May Day Sunday** - May 2 - A drive through Maypole with colors and festivity, and small group bluebell hikes (weather depending).
- **Flower Communion Sunday** - Sunday, June 6 - We are planning for an outdoor gathering service. More details to come!



Activity Pages



Questions to Ask Your Family and Friends

- What will you do when you graduate from high school/college?
- When was a time you were kind to someone else?
- Is it better to be optimistic or realistic? Why?
- If you could trade places with your parent(s)/child for a day, what would you do differently?
- What has been the happiest day of your life so far and why?





Our packed church ~ February 29, 2020



Church Contacts

Ann Hutton
 Luke Stevens-Royer
 Amy Nelson
 Melissa Egger
 Erika Fetterman
 Connie Schuelka
 Joe Mish
 Austin Ferguson
 Derik Robertson
 Chantelle Feddersen
 Darin Podulke-Smith

Board President
 Minister
 Director of Faith Development
 Coordinator of Congregational Life
 Office Administrator
 Congr. Administrator /Musician Emerita
 Co-Director of Music
 Co-Director of Music
 Youth Program Coordinator
 Childcare Coordinator
 Property Steward

president@uurochmn.org
 revluke@uurochmn.org
 dre@uurochmn.org
 congregationlife@uurochmn.org
 office@uurochmn.org
 administration@uurochmn.org
 music@uurochmn.org
 musicdirector@uurochmn.org
 youthprogram@uurochmn.org
 childcare@uurochmn.org
 custodian@uurochmn.org

First Unitarian Universalist Church



1727 Walden Lane SW
 Rochester, Minnesota 55902
 507-282-5209 | uurochmn.org
 Sunday Services & Religious Education
 9 & 11 am