
Courage

January 2024



Unity Church-Unitarian Spiritual Practice Packet



Courage

One of my favorite poems was penned by Amelia Earhart. I know it “by heart.” She writes, “Courage is the price that life exacts for granting peace. The soul that knows it not, knows no release from little things . . .” That is where the sound bite of this poem usually ends. However, it’s the rest of the poem that makes the first part of the poem more salient. Earhart continues, “. . . knows not the livid loneliness of fear, nor mountain heights where bitter joy can hear the sound of wings. How can life grant us the boon of living, compensate for dull gray ugliness and pregnant hate, unless we dare the soul’s dominion? Each time we make a choice, we pay with courage to behold the resistless day, and count it fair.”

When we think of “courage,” it’s natural to recall persons who have done extraordinary things. Amelia Earhart’s attempt to circumnavigate the globe ended in her disappearance, but her attempt nevertheless astonished and inspired millions. As we enter into the month of January, we can’t help but remember the many acts of courage by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, James Forman, Bayard Rustin, Diane Nash, Fannie Lou Hamer, Septima Pointsett Clark, Ella Baker and many others. Some of their actions made it into the news, others were known only through the lens of history and storytelling. We need those stories to remind us that ordinary people are capable of doing extraordinary things.

Yet, in most of our daily lives, it’s unlikely to call what we do “courageous.” Is getting out of bed an act of courage? It is if you suffer from chronic depression. Is restraining your temper an act of courage? It is when you know that to lash out in anger to your spouse or child could do serious damage to your relationship. What about the simple act of being confronted with change? Is that an act of courage? If courage is the ability to face one’s fears, or to exhibit strength in the midst of pain or grief, then yes, of course, it is.

Is then courage a muscle we get to develop? Certainly. Not unlike our New Year resolutions, they weaken without use. When we need our muscles most, they likely will fail us if we haven’t used them. Likewise, when we need to draw on courage—whether to face the unwelcome or the unexpected—we must also build our courage “muscles.” How might we do that? One way is to strengthen our ability to face the truth of what is really “real.” Courage then is developing the capacity to wade into the heart of despair or hopelessness and not become paralyzed by it.

There are many things in life that will challenge us. Certainly, the biggest challenge of all is facing the end of our lives—or the life of someone whom we love. Of the small changes which have been made this year to our embracing meditation, the one that has provoked the most conversation is this one: “Our lives are blessed by those who knowingly and with curiosity and courage face their final days.” Some have written and spoken verbally about how important and meaningful those two words are to them, “curiosity and courage.” Stories have been told of witnessing the end of a person’s life who indeed, did face their death with those two co-equal “muscles.” At the same time, stories were shared about those who didn’t face their end with curiosity and courage. They were frightened, or clinging, or in denial about the imminence of their life’s end. Do we judge them for not being curious or even courageous? Ah, the complexities and inadequacies of our language! To be curious about the end of one’s life takes energy and attention and not

all of us will have that. To be courageous can also mean not being in denial about death—one’s own or others. To face the truth with honesty is another form of courage.

If we circle back to Amelia Earhart’s poem for a moment, what she is saying is that courage enables us to feel alive—even if it is “the livid loneliness of fear.” Think of an artist, who makes a piece of art not knowing if it will truly express the thoughts or feelings that live inside of them. Or the writer, facing the blank page, wondering, “How can I translate this into something that moves me—and then, hopefully have an impact on others?” The courage to create, to continue to persist—can bring with it the rewards of, as Earhart describes “bitter joy.” Bitter because, like climbing a mountain, it is achieved only with great effort and sweat and sometimes tears. Yet, there is that moment, of standing on the mountaintop, blessed by the vista of a landscape one could not see while trudging on the trail.

May this month bring you joy—both bitter and sweet. May you find the courage to behold the resistless day—and count each one as fair.

By Rev. Kathleen Rolenz and this month’s theme team: Rev. Andrea La Sonde Anastos, Drew Danielson, Rev. KP Hong, and Rev. Dr. Tom Duke

Spiritual Practices

Option A

Imagine What Your Wiser Self Would Tell You

This exercise, adapted from *How Not to Be Afraid: Seven Ways to Live When Everything Seems Terrifying* by Gareth Higgins, helps us develop the courage to live with clarity from our wise center.

Eyes closed, breathing slowly, call to mind the faces of the people who have been wise guides for you. It's not important whether you've met them or whether they're real or fictional. Let their faces blend into each other, as if a series of translucent masks are placed on top of each other.

Then allow an image of your face to blend into theirs until what remains is the face of an elder, made up of the wisdom you find in the stories you've learned: the summation of elder wisdom, looking at you through your eyes. Imagine yourself to be this wise elder at the end of a long life, seeing their younger self—you—with the eyes of grace.

Ask yourself what this wise elder—this wise you—might want to say to you at earlier moments in your life. Then, ask yourself what this wise elder might want to say to you now. What might they tell you about yourself? What might they teach you? Might they warn you of anything? Encourage you? Reassure you?

Ask this wise elder, this wise you, what are the obstacles between who you are now and who they have become?

Imagine the wise elder welcoming you into the inheritance you have helped shape for yourself.

Sit there quietly for a few minutes. And when you're ready, inquire of the wise elder, the wise you. To become like this wise elder, what are three things you need to do today, and next week, and this year?

Speak these things aloud, and write them down, and do them.



Fridays for Future, CC BY 2.0

Option B

Reflecting on Difficulty

Jack Kornfield writes that a courageous heart faces difficulty with loving awareness rather than denying, reacting, or giving in to bitterness or despair. For this practice, sit quietly, feeling the rhythm of your breathing, allowing yourself to become calm and receptive. Then think of a difficulty that you face. As you sense this difficulty, take your time. Notice how it affects your body, how it feels in the heart, its energy in the mind. Feeling it carefully, begin to ask yourself a few questions, listening inwardly for their answers.

How have I approached this difficulty so far?

How have I suffered by my own response and reaction to it?

What does this problem ask me to let go of?

What suffering here is unavoidable, is my measure to accept?

What happens if I bring tender compassion to all the parts of this difficulty?

What courage is asked as I respond?

What great lesson might it be able to teach me?

What is the gold, the value, hidden in this situation?

In using this reflection to consider your difficulties, the understanding and openings may come slowly. Take your time. As with all meditations, it can be helpful to repeat this reflection a number of times, listening each time for deeper answers from your body, heart, and spirit.



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Questions to Ponder

Read through the questions below and notice which ones resonate with you. One or more of the questions might seem particularly compelling—or some might stir resistance in you. Either of these reactions might make the question fruitful to consider. Choose just one and take time to consider it, over several days if possible. Write it down on a piece of paper you carry in your pocket. Or take a picture of that paper with your phone. Or record it in your journal—and spend some time, each day if you can, reflecting on it in writing or otherwise, noticing where it leads you, what you learn from it, and your response to it.

Questions

1. When you consider your own courage, do you identify it more often in events or experiences in which you act? Or in events, experiences you resist?
2. Do you think of yourself as a courageous person? Why or why not?
3. Have you grown in courage throughout your life? What has helped you develop courage?
4. When have you been afraid and acted anyway?
5. Who has been a model of courage for you? What acts of courage inspire you most?
6. Who has encouraged you? Who do you encourage?
7. How is Unity a courageous congregation?
8. When have you had the courage to be yourself? to speak the truth? to act for justice?
9. Have you known a person who has faced their final days with courage? How did they show courage as they approached death?
10. Have you experienced courage as something given or graced?
11. There are many types of courage: the courage to face fear or uncertainty or difficulty; the courage to risk love or trust; the courage to be open or vulnerable or creative; the courage to show up; the courage to break out of old patterns or leave a destructive situation; the courage to take an unpopular stand or have a challenging conversation; and more. Is there a particular kind of courage you would like to develop? How can you begin?

What is your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't name what life is asking of you now, spend the month listening to your heart to hear what is your question.

Inspiration

Recommended Resources

For Personal Exploration & Reflection

Here you will find a variety of resources to help you take a deeper dive into the worship theme. These offer you several ways to engage with the theme that invite you to consider it thoughtfully, to inspire thinking, and open you to new insights. They are optional. As you browse the packet, consider trying out several that hold meaning for you and, possibly, one or two that may feel challenging.

Word Definitions

Courage—noun
mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty
(meriam-webster.com)

Wise Words

“Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.”

—Brené Brown

“Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, ‘I will try again tomorrow.’”

—Mary Anne Radmacher

“Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means at the point of highest reality.”

—C.S. Lewis

<https://www.whatsbestnext.com/2011/06/cs-lewis-on-courage/>



“The World is a Scary Place but I Have Armbands”

Photo by Fernando Jorge on Unsplash

“For me, faith has a lot to do with courage, and it’s the courage to step forward into the unknown and, first of all, to admit that we don’t know. You know, we can—we can be so afraid to admit that and—and try to be in control of absolutely everything. And to actually admit we don’t know, and yet to say, ‘You know, I have the strength to go forward anyway and to embrace what happens and to have an open-hearted participation in life,’ you know, for me, that’s a meaning of faith.”

—Sharon Salzberg

<https://onbeing.org/programs/sharon-salzberg-lawrence-kushner-anne-lamott-and-omid-safi-the-meaning-of-faith/>

“Courage is the resolve to do well without the assurance of a happy ending.”

—Kate Marvel

<https://onbeing.org/blog/kate-marvel-we-need-courage-not-hope-to-face-climate-change/>

“The only choice we have as we mature is how we inhabit our vulnerability, how we become larger and more courageous and more compassionate through our intimacy with disappearance, our choice is to inhabit vulnerability as generous citizens of loss, robustly and fully, or conversely, as misers and complainers, reluctant and fearful, always at the gates of existence, but never bravely and completely attempting to enter, never wanting to risk ourselves, never walking fully through the door.”

—David Whyte

<https://onbeing.org/blog/vulnerability/>

“We can choose courage or we can choose comfort, but we can’t have both. Not at the same time.”

—Brené Brown

“When I care to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision—then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.”

—Audre Lorde

https://www.azquotes.com/author/9041-Audre_Lorde/tag/fear

“Bring your most compassionate and vulnerable self to the conversation. Be ready to acknowledge that these conversations are hard for each person involved. ... Be ready to listen and find the hero in the other person. ... Connect to the emotional experience of another person. Empathy is about feeling the pain of another person. It deepens connection. ... Dig deep to understand the values important to us and connect them with the needs of the moment.”

—Henna Inam. “How to Have a Courageous Conversation About Race,” Forbes, June 4, 2020.

<https://bit.ly/47jzs2z>

“You have to develop ways so that you can take up for yourself, and then you take up for someone else. And so sooner or later, you have enough courage to really stand up for the human race and say, ‘I’m a representative.’”

—Maya Angelou

Poetry

Courage (excerpt)

Anne Sexton

It is in the small things we see it.
The child’s first step,
as awesome as an earthquake....

and at the last moment
when death opens the back door
you’ll put on your carpet slippers
and stride out.

<https://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php%3Fdate=2000%252F11%252F09.html>



Image by Bruce Emmerling from Pixabay

Love Demands Courage

Patty Willis

When you fell in love
Did the Earth move beneath you?
Or did love surround you
Slowly like gentle waves
You hardly noticed until
They reached your heart?

*In others’ stories,
We listen for our own
Of love that lasted
Sixty years
Or five months
Or three days.*

Have you waited
As I have
For someone to call?
Or did you
Wait by the phone,
Picking it up
Putting it down
And picking it up again?

*Have you stood next
To your beloved,
Angry and tired
And thinking,
If you say, “I am sorry,” first,
I will say it, too?*

Have you wondered
If your heart could
Bear the grief of
Your beloved's passing?

*Love demands courage
Loving sometimes takes
All that we have.*

Whether you are single
Or part of a pair.
Newly in love
Or in love for so long
You cannot remember

*Love demands courage
Loving sometimes takes
All that we have.*

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/responsive-reading/love-demands-courage>

The Chance to Love Everything (excerpt)

Mary Oliver

Did I see a black haunch slipping
back through the trees? Did I see
the moonlight shining on it?
Did I actually reach out my arms
toward it, toward paradise falling, like
the fading of the dearest, wildest hope—
the dark heart of the story that is all
the reason for its telling?

Read the entire poem here:

<https://www.poetseers.org/contemporary-poets/mary-oliver/mary-oliver-poems/the-chance-to-love-everything/>

Articles

“Lessons on Cultivating Courage From Maya Angelou”

by Ashleigh Hansberger. Motto, November 9, 2022.

“Despite traumatic childhood experiences and prejudices born of race, gender, and class, Angelou’s genius in poetry and prose grew from the darkest corner of a segregated 20th-century America.

Defying circumstance, she became one of our time’s most visionary thinkers and storytellers.”

<https://wearemotto.com/cultivating-courage/>

“How to Be Courageous”

by Susan Cain. Psychology Today, June 25, 2015.

The author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts* shares everyday ways to practice courage.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/quiet-the-power-of-introverts/201506/how-be-courageous>

“The Courageous Heart”

by Jack Kornfield. Jack, January 19, 2020.

“The courageous heart is the one that is unafraid to open to the world, to care no matter what..., to persevere through difficulties without giving in to bitterness and despair.”

<https://jackkornfield.com/the-courageous-heart/>



Image by Elias from Pixabay

“Six Ways to Find Your Courage During Challenging Times”

by Amy L. Eva

“Fortunately, courage comes in many forms.

Although definitions range, researchers tend to agree that it features three primary components: a risk, an intention, and a goal that may benefit others. In a classic example, a student defends a peer who is being verbally assaulted by a bully, by interrupting the bully and telling them to stop. This purposeful act may come at a cost—perhaps socially or physically.”

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six_ways_to_find_your_courage_during_challenging_times

“5 Ways To Show Courage Every Day”

by the Congressional Medal of Honor Society
Choosing to bring courage to every facet of your life isn't an easy task. It requires you to pull yourself out of your comfort zone for a cause, value, belief, or someone you care about. Being courageous comes in many different forms, and it's a trait we're all capable of embodying. Here are ways you can preserve the legacy of the Medal of Honor by demonstrating courage daily.

<https://www.cmohs.org/news-events/medal-of-honor-values/courage/5-ways-to-show-courage-every-day/>

Prayers

Grant me the strength to manifest
the seven forms of courage:
the courage to remain silent in the face of
 persecution,
when a word would be complicit,
when it is easier to lie;
the courage to speak when silence would collude in
 wrong,
when silence abandons another to danger or attack,
when affirmation upholds truth;
the courage to act on behalf of the innocent,
to protect the vulnerable from the oppressor,
to heal the wounded;
the courage to refrain from acting in violence,
to harm my neighbor or my enemy;
the courage to risk death to stand against war or
 abuse,
to act for the common good,
to provide a future for the generations;
the courage to risk life when choices are complex or
 unclear,
when my life is threatening to unholy power,
when I face pain, suffering, or oppression;
the courage to be transformed by new truth,
greater wisdom, and more perfect love.
May it be so.
May I be so.
—Andrea Anastos

Dua for Courage

اللهم امنحني القوة لأقاوم نفسي، والشجاعة لأواجه ضعفي، واليقين
لأقبل قدرتي، والرضا ليرتاح عقلي، والفهم ليطمئن قلبي
Oh Allah! Grant me the strength to oppose myself,
the courage to face my weakness, the conviction to
accept my faith, the satisfaction of to relax my mind,
and the understanding to reassure my heart.

Allahumma imnaHnee alQuwwah li aQwaami
nafsee, wa ash-Shujaa3ah li uwaajih da3fee, wa
alYaqeeni li ataQabbal qadree, wa ar-riDaa li yartaah
3aQalee, wa alfahm li yaTmainna Qalbee.

As it appears on the Islamic Relief USA website
<https://irusa.org/dua/>

Bless Me With Courage

from WRJ's Covenant of the Soul
Anita Rosenberg

Adonai, bless me with courage
Help me gain strength from You
Life has a way of handing us surprises
That take an amazing amount of courage to
 overcome
Create in me a clear and steady focus
A heart that is filled with the awareness that
Adonai is with me
On the sunniest day and in the darkest night
I will be whatever life demands of me
Courage is my knowledge of You.
<https://rac.org/bless-me-courage>

from “A Morning Offering”

by John O'Donohue

May I have the courage today
To live the life that I would love,
To postpone my dream no longer
But do at last what I came here for
And waste my heart on fear no more.

In *To Bless the Space Between Us* by John O'Donohue.
In the Unity Anderson Library: 242.8 O

Books

Speak Truth to Power: Human Rights Defenders Who Are Changing Our World

by Kerry Kennedy Cuomo. Umbrage Editions, 2000. This is a book of interviews with 50 people around the world who are changing the world through their courage and commitment. The book was published in 2000 and some of those Kerry Kennedy interviewed are no longer living. Those highlighted come from 35 countries across five continents. This is an excellent resource for ages late middle school through adult. Each interview includes a photographic portrait by Eddie Adams.
<https://rfkhumanrights.org/our-programs/speak-truth-to-power/sttp-book>

Planet of the Blind: A Memoir

Stephen Kuusisto. Delta, 1998
“The world is a surreal pageant,” writes Stephen Kuusisto. “Ahead of me the shapes and colors suggest the sails of Tristan’s ship or an elephant’s ear floating in air, though in reality, it is a middle-aged man in a London Fog raincoat which billows behind him in the April wind.”
<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/96427/planet-of-the-blind-by-stephen-kuusisto/>

Small Things Like These

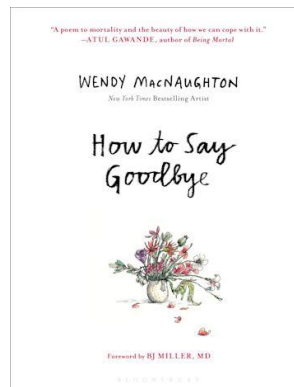
by Claire Keegan. Grove Press, 2021. It is 1985 in a small Irish town. Bill Furlong, a coal merchant and family man, makes a discovery that forces him to confront both his past and the complicit silences of a town controlled by the church. This tale of quiet courage is a remarkable portrait of love and family.
<https://groveatlantic.com/book/small-things-like-these/>

Finding Inner Courage

by Mark Nepo. Red Wheel, 2020.
“The original use of the word courage means to stand by one’s core....living from the Center is what enables us to face whatever life has to offer. This book is an exploration into how to find our way to the core, to stand by our core, and to then sustain the

practice of living from our core—to live out of our courage.” In the Unity Bookstall.

https://marknepo.com/books/finding_inner_courage/



How to Say Goodbye

by Wendy MacNaughton. Bloomsbury, 2023. As artist-in-residence at the Zen Hospice Project Guest House, Wendy MacNaughton experienced firsthand how difficult it is to know what to do when we're sharing final moments with a loved one.

In this tenderly illustrated guide to saying goodbye... MacNaughton shows how to make sure those moments are meaningful. Using a framework of ‘the five things’ taught to her by a professional caregiver, *How to Say Goodbye* provides a model for having conversations of love, respect, and closure.

In the Unity Anderson Library: 616.02 M
<https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/how-to-say-goodbye-9781639730858/>

Master Slave Husband Wife An Epic Journey from Slavery to Freedom

by Ilyon Woo. Simon & Schuster, 2023. The true story of Ellen and William Craft who escaped slavery in 1848, while traveling openly. Ellen posed as a sickly wealthy gentleman traveling with her slave, William. Even as they made it north to “free” territory, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act put them in constant danger yet they became powerful public speakers as they told their story of the evils of slavery and their brave escape.
<https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Master-Slave-Husband-Wife/Ilyon-Woo/9781501191053>

Children’s Books

Desert Queen

by Jyoti Rajan Gopal; illustrated by Svabhvu Kohli. Levine Querido, 2023.

This book is based on the life of Harish Kumar, who became known as Queen Harish, a drag performer in India. Harish was fascinated by dance from his early years and when his parents died young, leaving him to raise his two younger sisters, he began to perform as a Rajasthani folk dancer in female garb.

<https://www.levinequerido.com/desert-queen>

Doris

by Sarah Jacoby. Roaring Brook Press, 2023.

Doris dances to her own tune in this whimsical and emotionally resonant tale about finding the courage to be yourself.

<https://www.themarginalian.org/2023/08/15/doris-sarah-jacoby/>

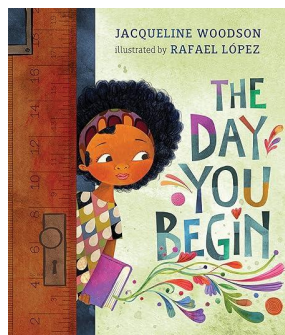
The Brave

by James Bird. Feiwel & Friends, 2020.

This book for middle school youth is about Collin who has OCD behavior that causes him to be bullied and expelled from schools. As the book opens, his father sends him to live with his Ojibwe mother in Duluth. There, as he is befriended by his neighbor, Orenda, he begins to overcome his challenges.

Contains the death of an important character.

<https://us.macmillan.com/books/9781250247759/thebrave>



The Day You Begin

by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael López. Nancy Paulson Books, 2018.

“There will be times when you walk into a room and no one there is quite like you.”

It’s not easy to go into a place where no one knows

you, yet with courage, we go ahead anyway. *The Year We Learned to Fly* is the sequel.

<https://jacquelinewoodson.com/product/the-day-you-begin/>

Movies



Nyad

Written by Diana Nyad and Julie Cox; directed by Jimmy Chin and Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi. Netflix, 2023.

This award-winning film tells the remarkable true story of athlete Diana Nyad who, at the age of 60 (three decades after giving up swimming), with the

help of her best friend and coach, commits to achieving her life-long dream: a 110-mile open ocean swim from Cuba to Florida, which is often referred to as the “Mount Everest” of swims.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5302918/>

Time

Directed by Garrett Bradley, 2020.

In this intimate documentary filmed over two decades, a courageous woman fights for her husband’s release from the Louisiana State Penitentiary as she raises their sons.

<https://www.amazon.com/Time-Fox-Rich/dp/B0817DDG1Y>

Videos

“A Family Revealed: From Slavery to Hope”

Living Legacy Project, 2023.

In an evening of engaging music and conversation, Reggie Harris and Wallis Wickham Raemer, one Black and one white, and both descendants of a Confederate enslaver, tell their story through their respective lenses. As recently embraced cousins, they relate their experience of discovering the other’s deeply held feelings, pain, and hope on their journey to reclaiming history and becoming present-day family.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7Z3YN0Jr1U>

“The Breathtaking Courage of Harriet Tubman”

Janell Hobson. TED-Ed, July 2018.

This TED video is a brief animation suitable for children about the courage of Harriet Tubman

https://www.ted.com/talks/janell_hobson_the_breathtaking_courage_of_harriet_tubman

“The Courage to Tell a Hidden Story”

Eman Mohammed, March 2014.

A visual TED Talk by Eman Mohammed, the first Palestinian female journalist to work in Gaza.

https://www.ted.com/talks/eman_mohammed_the_courage_to_tell_a_hidden_story

Music

“Courage” Spotify Playlist

<https://spoti.fi/3tFP9TF>

“(Something Inside) So Strong” —Labi Siffre,
Kevin W. Smith

“The Climb”—Miley Cyrus

“Nothing to Lose (Yi Wu Suo You)” —Cui Jian

“The Lion (Gaiende)” —Youssou N’Dour

“Symphony No. 3, Op. 36 ‘Symphony of
Sorrowful Songs’: 2. Lento e Largo” —Henryk
Górecki

“I Whistle a Happy Tune” —Rodgers and
Hammerstein

“The Greatest” —Sia

“Road to Joy - Bright-Side Mix” —Peter Gabriel

“Follow Your Arrow” —Kacey Musgraves

Photos



Rev. Olympia Brown, c. 1919.

Just because it hasn’t been done before, doesn’t mean you can’t do it. Despite many obstacles, Olympia Brown was one of the first women to graduate from college in the U.S., in 1860. She then went on to graduate from divinity school, after which she became the first woman in the U.S. to be ordained by any denomination; ordained in 1864 by the Universalist Church.

Cover Image: Australian artistic gymnast, Lauren Mitchell, performing a layout step-out on the balance beam during the 41st World Artistic Gymnastics Championships in London, United Kingdom, on 14 October 2009.

Photo by Steven Rasmussen. CC BY-SA 2.0.

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