



Sacrifice

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.

The poem, 'Questionnaire' by Wendell Berry asks the reader some very provocative questions: *How much poison are you willing to eat for the success of the free market and global trade? Please name your preferred poisons. In the name of patriotism and the flag, how much of our beloved land are you willing to desecrate? List the mountains, rivers, towns and farms you could most readily do without. State the ideals, hopes and the kinds of security for which you would kill a child. Name the children whom you would be willing to kill.*

These very direct questions are hard to hear and even more difficult to answer. They ask us to name what sacrifices we are willing to make and also to see the horrendous consequences that will occur to our beloved earth and its people if we don't make some difficult but absolutely necessary sacrifices. This month's theme of sacrifice invites us to consider the implications of this complex and difficult word. Many of us think of sacrifice in terms of giving up something of value for something of greater value. But the Latin origins of the word provide more nuance: *Sacre* and *facere* means to make sacred or holy. Sacrifice has an important role in our religious and family lives because sacrifice makes sacred and holy the relationships, the institutions, and the values that the sacrifice honors.

Gandhi cautions that religion without sacrifice, one of the seven social sins, will destroy us. Religion without sacrifice asks nothing from people but to sit self-satisfied and self-serving in the pews instead of building the beloved community we all long for. So what does our faith ask us to make sacred and holy? If it is not burnt offerings, fasting for 40 days, or even tithing,

what is being asked of us? Perhaps one answer to this question can be found in the Hebrew Scripture of Micah 6:8. The people ask God what is required of them and God answers that it is a way of life that values justice, loving-kindness, and humility. Isn't this what our Seven Principles call us toward? To love — God, our neighbor, and ourselves. We are meant to love. Taking down the walls that divide us and ensuring that no one is left outside the circle.

Unity Church asks us to build community where love is at the center and to live lives of integrity, service, and joy. By attending services regularly, making a yearly pledge (and we highlight this during our pledge drive which kicks off this month), nurturing a spiritual practice, and acting for justice in the world is a way to live a sacred and holy life. And I would add, for those of us who are white, sacrificing our comfort, control, stability, and the way it has always been done will also be necessary if we want to dismantle the culture of white supremacy that we swim in every day. Welcome discomfort as much as you can understanding that it is the root of all growth and learning; deepen your political analysis of racism and oppression so you have a strong understanding of how your personal experience and feelings fit into a larger picture; don't take everything personally.

What values, relationships, and institutions will your sacrifices honor and make holy this year?

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Sacrifice Theme Resources

FOR FAMILIES

The Legend of the Blue Bonnet by Tomie DePaola

Their Great Gift. Courage, Sacrifice, and Hope in a New Land by John Coy

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows by JK. Rowling

VIDEO

PBS Documentary: *Defying the Nazis: The Sharps' War* (2016)

Tells the story of Waitstill & Martha Sharp, a Unitarian minister and his wife who left their children behind in the care of their parish and boldly committed to multiple life-threatening missions in Europe

PBS Documentary: *Last Men in Aleppo* (2017)

A harrowing look at the heroic work of two men of the Syrian Civil Defense's White Helmets, civilian volunteers who are usually the first responders in the country's civil war.

BOOKS

Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High by Melba Pattillo Beals

The Jakatas: Tales of India by Ellen C. Babbitt

POETRY

"Questionnaire" by Wendell Berry
Micah 6:6-8 • What does the Lord require of you? But to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.