UU Identity & History

Lesson 8: How Do We Live Our Faith? Prophetic UU Women

12.6.2026

Objectives: Introduce UU faith through lives of prophetic women.

Materials: Lesson attachments, props.

Time allotment: Suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 20 minute closing service (end class around 9:50/11:50 to begin chapel 9:55/11:55).

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1. **Nametags and Graffiti Wall** (5 minutes before class begins)**:**
   - Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
   - "Graffiti Wall" questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
     - Name a woman who inspires you and share why.
     - Draw/write what comes to mind when you hear "prophet."
   - Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. **Silly Fun: Guess the Rhythm** (5 minutes max)

   One youth leads and changes the rhythm. The group mimics the changing rhythm while another youth tries to guess who the leader is.

   Prep: Teachers, pick one youth to be the "guesser" and ask them to leave the room. Quietly, select a different youth to be the "leader" by pointing at them. The rest of the group should follow the "leader" without exposing who they are. The "leader" can clap, snap, move their body, etc. to start and change the rhythm. Once the rhythm starts, invite the "guesser" to come back into the room. The "guesser" gets three tries to identify the "leader." Repeat as time allows.

3. **Chalice Lighting:** Light the chalice, saying these words together: *"We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love."*

   Teacher reads: (from Unitarian activist, Dorothea Dix)

   "As my own discomfort has increased, my conviction of necessity to search into the wants of the friendless and afflicted has deepened. If I am cold, they too are cold; if I am weary, they are distressed; if I am alone, they are abandoned."

4. **Prophets and Prophetic Imagination** (10 minutes)

Teacher talks: Our second UU source from which our faith tradition draws inspiration and wisdom is: *Words and deeds of prophetic women and men that challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love.* Consider four definitions of prophets from the dictionary:

a) One who utters divinely inspired revelations.

b) One gifted with more than ordinary spiritual or moral insight.

c) One who foretells future events.

d) One who speaks truth to people in power.

Questions for Discussion:

- What does revelation mean?

  (Hint: realizing a surprising or unknown truth, often in a dramatic, life-altering, or profound way.)

- What does moral insight mean?

  (Hint: it's complex! It involves exploring possible solutions from multiple perspectives beyond what appears to be the limitations or problem. "What could I/we do?" is a question that can lead to moral insight.)

- What if we interpret "foretelling future events" as imagining or envisioning a future that does not yet exist? What does visionary mean?

  (Hint: having an idea of how the world ought to be and daring to ask, "what if?")

- What does speaking truth to power mean?

  (Hint: exposing and sharing a truth to people and structures of power for the purpose of making the truth a reality. For example, "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal" or "all people have inherent worth and dignity" are truths that are not yet a reality. Movements like BLM and MeToo seek to speak truth to power.)

Teachers pass out attachment and read quote by theologian, Walter Brueggemann *(pronunciation: brew-gah-mun)*:

"*The prophet engages in futuring fantasy. The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined. The imagination must come before the implementation. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing. The same royal consciousness that make it possible to implement anything and everything is the one that shrinks imagination because imagination is a danger. Thus every totalitarian regime is frightened of the artist. It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing futures alternative to the single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one.*"

- What is Brueggemann saying about prophets?

  (Hint: Imagination is a vital prophetic tool. One has to envision how something can be different before one can put it into practice/affect material change.)

- In what ways does this quote resonate with our definitions of prophets?

5. Women Prophets Who Live the Faith (25 minutes)

Teacher summarizes: In our Unitarian Universalist tradition, prophetic people are not confined to a single religious tradition. In fact, they are not confined to religion at all. Wherever people from any walk of life—secular, religious, political, musical, educational—***speak truth to those in power*** and challenge us to stand up to evil and expand justice, peace, and love, we seek their wisdom. We are concerned not only with the *founders* of the faith but deeply concerned with those who ***practice moral insight and carry visionary work forward*** in any generation, including ourselves. Unitarian Universalism is a way of ***unfolding revelation, or of never-ending revelation***, where every generation and every person can be a prophet.

There are many prophetic women in our tradition from Unitarian Susan B. Anthony—an abolitionist and suffragette who was arrested for casting a vote in the 1872 presidential election (white women's vote was legalized about 50 years later, in 1920)—to Universalist Rev. Olympia Brown—the first U.S. woman fully ordained as a minister (in any denomination) and who preached for peace during World War I.

Today, we are going to tell the stories of Dorothea Dix and Clara Barton.

a) Split the class into two, giving one group Dorothea Dix's bio and set of props and the other group Clara Barton's bio and set of props.

b) Instruct both groups to read through their bio. Then give each group <u>five minutes</u> to split the story into a beginning, middle, and end, highlighting the most important parts and selecting at least three props (one for each part of the story).

   - Ideally, each group should have at least three different narrators and three different stage managers, presenting the prop/s (adjust based on attendance).
   - If desired, youth can have more than three plot points (e.g. reading Barton's letter aloud).
   - Teachers should allow youth to lead, but help delegate roles as needed.

c) Pick one group to present first! Each group has <u>five minutes</u> to tell their story. After each presentation, allow questions from the audience (monitor Q&A, so each group has five minutes to present).

6. **Questions for Discussion** (10 minutes)

   **Prioritize what suggests deeper youth engagement over getting to all questions.*

   - Thinking back to prophets speaking truth to power, what were **Dorothea Dix's** truths and who were the powerful people to whom she spoke them?

     (Hint: that women and poor people deserve education, asked her Grandmother to start a school; that people with mental illness are feeling beings with inherent worth and dignity, wrote letters to politicians and publicly testified.)

   - Where does such prophetic courage come from? Where did it come from for **Dorothea Dix**? For **Clara Barton**?

     (Hint: inspiring mentors, supportive friends and community, first-hand witness or experience of injustice, faith in God as love, interconnectedness/moral conscience/ compassion exposing the inherent worth and dignity of every person.)

   - As we discussed, a prophet holds extraordinary spiritual or moral insight. **Clara Barton** offers a powerful insight in her letter: from *not participating in war* to *having no vote* to *having no voice* to *loss of citizenship* to *having no rights* to *submission to wrongs* to *being nobody* to *not knowing anything* to *silencing and disabling any dissent*. What is she trying to say here?

     (Hint: How are injustices linked, not only across geographical distance, but linked from one injustice to another injustice? Think about Martin Luther King, Jr.'s quote, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.")

   - Both women envisioned a different future from their present reality, which led them to make extraordinary choices and work to offer the same degree of choice to others. How do you practice imagining a different future? What are some important choices you have made? What are important choices you would want for everyone to have?

   - Who are other people you consider prophetic? Why?

     (e.g. Malala Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg, Emma Gonzales (Parkland survivor), William Barber (Poor People's Campaign), Winona LaDuke, Katherine Johnson (NASA scientist), Audre Lorde, Sylvia Rivera, James Baldwin, names they wrote during Graffiti wall.)

   - What movements do you consider prophetic? Why?

     (e.g. BLM, MeToo, Never Again (gun control movement), climate justice, Poor People's Campaign.)

7. **Say goodbye until next time:** Extinguish the chalice, saying together: *"May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts."*

8. **Help clean up classroom** before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.
    - leave lesson plan and all materials organized
    - wipe the whiteboard clean
    - tables and chairs neatly returned
    - nametags collected in Ziploc bag
    - leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets