

Unity Church-Unitarian Spiritual Practice Packet

Belonging

May 2026



break open
evangelize love
abiding hunger
joyful visions
transformation

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CIRCLES

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About the artwork in this packet:

[Fine Acts](#) teamed up with the [Democracy & Belonging Forum](#), an initiative of the [Othering and Belonging Institute](#) (OBI) at the University of California, Berkeley – to produce a collection of powerful visual artworks on the topic of Bridging & Belonging.

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Cover: “Community Needs Care,” Camila Leão for Fine Acts x OBI

Belonging

“Belonging” is a repeated theme from the 2024-25 congregational year. As we move into discussing belonging in the context of our new ends statements, here is an excerpt from a sermon I (Oscar) preached in September 2024, soon after starting this role at Unity Church. After telling a story about mistaking hotdish for casserole during the interview process, I continued:

Belonging is knowing that it’s hotdish, and not casserole. Or, more broadly, knowing without needing to use words “how we do things here.” Knowing the cultural practices and norms that are unspoken, but that mean you are around “your people.”

There’s great power, and comfort, in that sense of belonging. Last week I asked you to think about what draws you to this place. I’ve been a part of seven Unitarian Universalist congregations at this point, in four states and two continents, and in all of them there’s often a common story: “I walked for the first time, looked around, and realized that I had found my people. I’ve been here ever since.” Sometimes that recognition is easy to name – you can often find a gathering of UU ministers by the prevalence of Prii and Subarus in a parking lot — and sometimes it is harder to name. But it is a comfort. Even getting hotdish wrong, it has been comfortable for my family and I to settle into this congregation, in part because Unity is very Unitarian, and that is a set of cultural norms and eccentricities we know well.

But I wonder if we can complicate that feeling a little bit?... Last week Ailish started second grade, and waiting for the bus one morning, we had a conversation about how many grades there are. One thing led to another, and I ended up telling her (after some mental math), that I had finished 26th grade. Doctorate, master's, bachelor's, most of another master's degree, plus the 12 she knew. I am comfortable in communities that ask about the letters behind your name. My parents pushed me and my sister to excel in school, and had the resources to support it, and we both ended up with plenty of letters and stable, successful careers. But there’s a shadow side to that.

On the first day of school, we asked Ailish a few questions for a back-to-school photo: what was her favorite color (pink), favorite band (Taylor Swift), what did she want to be when she grew up? (A mom). When I grow up, I want to be a mom. Not an astronaut, not a scientist, but the kind of person she loves most in the whole world. And I paused. I paused wondering how (if?) to explain that to people in my new congregation when I showed them the picture of my daughter on the first day of school.

When we talk about belonging, we are necessarily making normative statements — here’s what we expect in this setting, what we implicitly understand to be the agreements shared among everyone in the room. The challenge is that statements about expectation, even as simple as “UU ministers often drive a Toyota Prius” can quickly become judgments. “If you are a UU minister who drives a pickup, you must not care about the environment.” The challenge is also in moments when we are forced to examine the implicit assumptions about belonging — making explicit some parts of who feels like they belong that we would rather just ignore.

Those normative statements, explicit or implicit, aren’t always bad. “That’s not how we do things here” is a powerful statement because it sets expectations in the context of group dynamics. Sometimes the most effective critique of bad behavior is contrasting it with established norms.

There's also an element to this that is self-protective, right? A community defines who belongs with implicit agreements that draw a distinction between those inside, and those outside. It is self-protective, because whenever you add someone or something to a system (say, a senior minister), the system changes. Making sure that the minister knows to say "hotdish" instead of "casserole" is a way to establish the expectations of a community, the things that the system does not want to change, even as some kind of change is inevitable.

Every Sunday at Unity, we say from the front of the sanctuary that "All of who you are, your gifts and your wounds, are welcome here." Belonging is, for Unitarian Universalists, final and unconditional: all people are welcome, all are loved, all belong in the beloved community. At the same time, we experience belonging as subjective and conditional: not every behavior is welcome in our congregations, and even as we evolve and change there are pieces of who we are as a community that we want to hold onto. It is in the dance between the theological imperative of belonging and the need to ensure our community is welcoming and safe for all that we "cultivate a multigenerational community of joy, care, and belonging."

Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair

On behalf of this month's theme team.



"We All Belong Here," Zofia Chamienia
Poland/Scotland

Spiritual Practices

Spiritual practices are the habits in our lives that center us, open our attention more fully, and nurture our connections to something larger than ourselves. A practice becomes spiritual when done with attention, intention, and repetition. At Unity, members are asked to develop a spiritual practice to help us find and keep our balance. Spiritual practices can be simple, like a walk in the woods, or structured, like tai chi. Here are theme-related practices that may hold possibilities for you.

Belonging at Unity

Think of a time, situation or activity at Unity or with Unity members when you have felt like you belonged to the community. You may find it helpful to write about or perhaps draw a picture of this experience. What happened? Who was there? What did belonging feel like: in your body, in your breath, in your mind? If there were people present, how were they part of that belonging? What was said? Was there music? Ritual? Visual images? Try to capture all of the elements that contributed to your feeling of belonging.

Belonging to the Earth

Of the many types of belonging and ways to belong, a connection to something larger than ourselves, whether it is our congregation, a tribe, a family legacy, or the interconnection of all life, feeds our spirit. Many often forget that nature is not something separate from us. Native poet Joy Harmony said, “Humans are vulnerable and rely on the kindnesses of the earth and the sun; we exist together in a sacred field of meaning.”

For this practice, go and be among many living things, trees, grass, bees; maybe visit a place that is special to you but you can even see and acknowledge the interconnectedness of human life and all other life in your own backyard or a nearby park.

Take a breath and consider that the oxygen you are taking in was created by the plant life you see and the plant life you don't see. Offer gratitude. Breathe out, and consider how the carbon dioxide you exhale helps plant life thrive. Give with kindness. Take a few minutes to practice the give and take. We exist together.

Take a small handful of soil, rich with organic matter, or of compost that you have tended. The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture tells us that there are more organisms, like bacteria and fungi, in a teaspoon of healthy soil than there are people on earth. Consider all the ways the earth feeds us, literally and spiritually. We rely on the kindness of the earth and sun.

To develop belonging to things greater than ourselves, takes practice. Besides repeating the above practices from time to time, what other ways do you experience interconnectedness, belonging, and the give and take with other forms of natural life? How are we dependent on nature and how is nature dependent on our good stewardship of it? Do you feel a connection to natural things that will outlive you? Consider developing another spiritual practice that offers you the same belonging to the earth.

Adapted from [“3 Mindful Practices to Increase a Sense of Belonging”](#) by Andy Tix, Psychology Today, January 15, 2025.

Keeping Each Other in Our Prayers and Thoughts

With Unity’s Covenant for Chalice Circles, members agree to keep each other in our prayers and thoughts, as the congregation is encouraged to do each Sunday. Certainly, we have many ways of doing this. We may pray for others, include them in lovingkindness or other meditation, or bless them in another way. We may hold them in the light, perhaps picturing them. We may pause to think of them kindly, or express gratitude for them. We may write their names. We may hold any joys and sorrows they may have shared.

These practices can deepen our sense of belonging—to each other, to the group, and to Unity Church. UU Minister Sue Magidson writes, “Praying for the well-being of others in a Buddhist metta style of wishing what’s best for them opens my heart. Praying for people with whom I’m having difficulty is the best way I know to access my compassion and shift the energy between us. Sending blessings to people I pass as I drive to work—including the drivers who cut me off—reminds me that we are all connected.” And knowing that we ourselves are kept in the prayers and thoughts of others deepens our belonging as well.

This month, be intentional about keeping the members of your Chalice Circle in your prayers and thoughts in whatever ways are meaningful to you. You may want to try new ways to bring each of them to your awareness. Then, expand your practice to include others at Unity: those you know, and those you don’t know. You may want to lift up people named in the Embracing Meditation each week, or those with a particular joy or sorrow, or those at a threshold. You may choose to hold the work of a justice ministry, or the ministers, staff, or other leaders and groups. You may bless the building, or the grounds, or our neighbors.

Towards the end of the month, take time to reflect on your practice. Has it changed you in any way? In particular, has it changed your sense of belonging and connection at Unity—in your Chalice Circle, or in other places or ways? How does it feel to know that others have been keeping you in their prayers and thoughts? How will you continue keeping others in your prayers and thoughts? Share what you like with your Chalice Circle.



[Teo Georgiev for OBI x Fine Acts](#)

Questions to Ponder

Unitarian Universalism doesn't have all the answers, but considering questions is one way for you to think about our faith and develop your own understanding of it. Read through the questions and mark which ones resonate with you or stir resistance in you; either reaction may lead to fruitful consideration. Choose one and take time to reflect on it over several days, perhaps writing it down and carrying it with you. How did you respond to the question? What did you learn? Where did it lead you?

Questions

1. Where do you feel you most belong? What makes you feel that way? Alternately, where are places you have not felt you belonged and why?
2. Did you learn about belonging to a faith community as a child? Who taught you or modeled how to belong to a faith community? What does it mean to be a community of belonging?
3. When you feel belonging, where do you experience it in your body? When you long for or feel longing, do you feel it in the same place? If they are different, how would you describe the difference?
4. How do you discern where you optimally belong as part of an organization or community? Do you get a gut feeling (about a place, situation, a group of people)? Do you create a list of pros and cons and weigh them? Do you receive insight through your dreams? What factors most prominently into your sense of belonging?
5. We have all experienced partings or breakups of one sort or another. We move out of the home of our parents, we finish our studies at one school and move on to another, we change jobs, friendships dissolve, marriages may end. Perhaps we move from one state to another, or even from one country to another. Thinking of a few specific partings that you have experienced, how have each of these partings influenced your sense of belonging?
6. How expansive is your sense of belonging? Do you yearn for belonging to a family (born or chosen)? To a group (anything from a book group to a congregation)? A political party? A religious tradition? A city? State? Nation? Vocation? A geography? The universe? How are those similar? Different? Present? Absent?
7. How would you describe your sense or style of belonging at Unity Church? Are you content with it, or would you like it to be different in some way? What would need to happen for it to be different?
8. What does Unity do well to help people feel they belong? What could it do better or differently? What does it take to promote belonging in a church like ours?
9. Eco-psychology is a branch of psychology that focuses on the relationship of people to their environment. Some posit that the landscape in which we grow up – where we play as children – becomes part of our psyche and we will always feel especially at home (i.e., that we belong) in similar landscapes. Do you feel this is true for you?
10. Do you have a sense of belonging as a Unitarian Universalist?

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 your question is.

Inspiration

Recommended Resources

For Personal Exploration & Reflection

Here you will find a variety of optional resources to help you take a deeper dive into and engage with the worship theme, in order to inspire thinking and open you to new insights. As you browse the packet, engage with those that hold meaning for you and one or two that may feel challenging.

Theme Definition

This theme focuses on belonging as it applies to our faith community – Unity in particular and Unitarian Universalism in general. Our specific Unity end focuses on cultivating “a multigenerational community of joy, care, and belonging.”

The dictionary defines “belonging” to mean being accepted, valued and included. Some synonyms for belonging include connection, affinity and attachment.

Belonging has been a chalice circle spiritual packet topic several times before. In 2019, belonging was defined to mean, “to be a member of, part of a particular group, organization or class.” In 2024, the synonyms included fellowship, relationship, kinship, loyalty and rapport and a distinction was drawn between mere belonging (connection to an individual or group) and social belonging — a “sense of relatedness connected to a positive, lasting, and significant interpersonal relationship.”

Some define belonging as the need to be part of something bigger than ourselves, while others emphasize the importance of belonging to ourselves – accepting and being comfortable with who we are regardless of whether we are accepted by others. Rev. Sean Neil-Barron reminds us that “People don’t join a cause. People join people. Not ideas. Not institutions. Not issues.... People don’t want to be convinced, they want to feel claimed by a ‘we’ that doesn’t dissolve who they are but magnifies it into a shared power.” See [“A Theology of Community Organizing”](#)

Wise Words

“True belonging is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a part of something and standing alone in the wilderness. True belonging doesn’t require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are.”

—Brene Brown, *The Call to Courage*

“We’re not looking for affirmation or acceptance from anyone else to be comfortable in whatever place or group we happen to be in. True belonging simply requires us to show up authentically and not place the burden of belonging on what someone else thinks, says or does.”

—Kaye, Scared Journeys Spiritual Community

“There is a song beneath the soil. Ten million million voices raise their call in no human language. Life flows through the tangle of roots, mycelium, microbiota, and crawling burrowing tunneling life.

The song flows upward through trunks and stems and blades of tender grasses and races out into the air. It is picked up and carried on no human tongues. It is in the footfall of paw and hoof, it hums in the buzz of wings and the fluttering of feathers, it shines on scales and fins and slithering skins.

And if we are quiet and pay attention, sometimes we remember that we are part of this song as well and we have notes to sing.”

—Irene Glasse & Rebekah Savage, “Charge from the Earth”



[Burcu Köleli for OBI x Fine Acts](#)

“...the bravery of Renée Nicole Good... 'She died for our belonging'.... We all owe it to her and to our children to turn grief into grounding, fear into presence, and loss into a fierce refusal to disappear.”

—Anisa Hagi-Mohamed, MN immigrant

“To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.”

—Simone Weil

“Is not the sky a father, and the earth a mother, and are not all living things with feet or wings or roots their children?”

—Black Elk

“All creatures go forth from Me and all return unto Me; thus rise and set my immense days and nights.”

—Bhagavad Gita 9:7

“No need to hurry, no need to sparkle, no need to be anyone but oneself.”

—Virginia Woolf

“Most '79ers [Iranians who migrated after the 1979 revolution] have lived in that ambiguous zone between longing for their past in Iran and wanting to belong to their present lives....a new generation—born outside Iran—has inherited and contended with their '79er parents' place of limbo,

that place between longing and belonging, and lived it through their unique prism.”

—Niloufar Talebi, *Belonging: New Poetry by Iranians Around the World*

“We were a family. Sometimes dysfunctional, for sure. But we were constantly reminded of our connection to one another. We referred to each other as brother and sister. As we grew closer, those titles changed to Auntie, Uncle, even Momma.

I had to wait till adulthood before I heard the name James Cone or read about Black liberation theology. But by the time I learned of Black Jesus and his liberating power, I knew I had already met him at ten years old, in a Baptist church where the Spirit moved us every week. There Jesus cared about my soul, but he also cared about the woman who didn't have transportation or couldn't pay the light or water bill. Jesus cared about the folks who were addicted to drugs or alcohol, who wanted to save their bodies from the poison and their hearts from pain. And for those whose families hurt us, or significant others had left us, or supervisors didn't understand us—all these things were taken very seriously, but every Sunday we were also reminded that trouble don't last always. Heartbreak and struggle weren't the end of our story....The Black church gave me the greatest sense of belonging I had ever experienced.”

—Austin Channing Brown, *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*

“I have a friend that calls this mutuality, the truth that says, We don't just welcome you or accept you; we need you. We are insufficient without you. One part's absence renders the whole impoverished in some way, even if the whole didn't previously apprehend it. In mutuality, belonging is both a gift received and a gift given. There is comfort in being welcomed, but there is dignity in knowing that your arrival just shifted a group toward greater wholeness.”

—Cole Arthur Riley, *This Here Flesh*

“Bridging is a salve for our fractured world. We can overcome the illusion of separateness by honoring our differences, transcending the notion that difference divides us, and instead co-create a world where everyone belongs.”

—john a. powell, *The Power of Bridging*

Poetry

Poems are excerpted. Click on the poem title (link) to read the whole poem.

[Belonging](#)

Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

And if it's true we are alone,
we are alone together,
the way blades of grass
are alone, but exist as a field...
When we feel alone,
we belong to the grand communion
of those who sometimes feel alone...

[Testimony](#)

Rebecca Baggett

I want you to understand that you are
no more and no less necessary
than the brown recluse, the ruby-
throated hummingbird, the humpback
whale, the profligate mimosa.

[We Are of a Tribe](#)

Alberto Rios

The sky is our common home, the place we all live.
There we are in the world together. ...
Look up. Stay a while. Let your breathing slow.
Know that you always have a home here.

It's Your Weird I Want

Donna Ashworth (excerpt)

I revel in the weird and wonderful, the new and
the unique, the free and the quirky. So do not wear
your normal for me, dear heart, it's your weird I
came to see. It's your weird I very much want to
meet.

[The House of Belonging](#)

David Whyte

This is the bright home
in which I live,
this is where
I ask
my friends
to come,
this is where I want
to love all the things
it has taken me so long
to learn to love.

[Remember](#)

Joy Harjo, *She Had Some Horses*, 1983

Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have
their
tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to
them,
listen to them. They are alive poems.

[In Church](#)

D. Keith Naylor

Pew-bound at nine in a midwestern Black Baptist
church,
I, whose childhood fidgeting was, in part, a longing
for a wider world,
listened to the congregation of sisters and brothers
humming.
They abandoned the well-worn words to the songs
of faith
for the spiritual splendor of sounds welling up in
human bodies,
sounds beyond or prior to soprano, alto, tenor and
bass,
harmonizing melody and moan, connecting
themselves to each other
and to their God, like electric current....

Articles

[“Beloved”](#)

Victoria Safford (excerpt)

But I believe we are called to move through our days
as if we are beloved of God, as if we all belong, we

ourselves and everyone else, and every living thing. When I say, “You are beloved of God,” I mean you are beloved OF COURSE. You just are.” ...

We are here now, and we all belong. Beloved. And therefore my work, however imperfect at the end of each day, my work and my joy is to strive to act accordingly, as if in your presence (whoever you are, wherever on this earth you are), I am in the presence of the holy. I have no other words to describe it, this love that guides us, calls us, heals us, and holds us in its hands.

“Belonging”

Mark Schaefer. Some, uh, Theologica, n.d.
A brief discussion of what spiritual belonging is and what it isn't, the rituals of belonging (like Coming of Age), and some thoughts on Martin Luther King Jr. and the inclusivity of belonging. He writes, “Belonging shouldn't be a simple descriptor of whether someone does or does not fit in. It should be a challenge, a task, a calling for us to extend belonging to those who do not have it. For it is in extending welcome to others, it is in working for justice so that no one is denied access to the resources that make life livable, it is in working to create spaces of inclusion and belonging, that we find our truest, most meaningful belonging.”

“What if Membership Was a Spectrum?”

Carey McDonald, Lori Emison Clair, Marie Luna
As Unitarian Universalists, we have traditionally operated under a model of church that doesn't acknowledge the changing social norms about religion. Historically, we've only kept track of one aspect of involvement in church life, “membership”, which typically means signing a congregation's membership book and making an annual pledge. But in reality, people interact with faith communities in dozens of different ways beyond the traditional notion of membership, often deepening and stepping back over the course of their lives. If we truly believe that everyone in our faith movement matters, whether they are official members or not, it

is clear we need to re-conceive what it means to be connected to Unitarian Universalism.

“Belonging to the Earth”

Erika Shadowsong, Fall/Winter UU World, 2022
I find a lot of hope in that idea of belonging to each other and the earth. I believe that what will help lead us to heal the planet is embracing this as a spiritual perspective, not simply a philosophical or metaphorical one. From the well of spirit, human beings have always drawn the hope that is required to survive constant crises. Spirit moves our hands and flies forth from our tongues with the powerful force of inspiration that bypasses conscious thought and purpose. It is easier to change things from a place of spiritual conviction than moral outrage or empathetic desperation.

“Don't forget your belongings”

Celie Katovitch, UU World, 2015
Belonging makes a claim upon your whole person. It both asks and promises a quality of relationship: a sense of deeply and truly being with others, together, through thick and thin. Its great blessing is, as the poet Mary Oliver says, a sense of “your place in the family of things.”



Prayers

Joy Atkinson

We are of the stars,
the dust of the explosions
cast across space.

We are of the earth:
we breathe and live in the breath
of ancient plants and beasts...

We are a part
of the great circle of humanity
gathered around the fire, the
hearth, the altar.

Shakti, la Madre, Mother of Us All

Manish Mishra-Marzetti

(Excerpt)

Shakti,
la Madre,
Mother of us all,
be with me
in this groundless
ground of being.
One foot firmly on the earth,
touching You;
the other hovering,
not quite here,
not quite there.
This in-between time
both open
and maddening in its
lack of surety....

Perhaps the ground of being
I seek
is in knowing
the solidity
of who I am,
what I care about,
and what I will stand for,
in service to,
in relationship with,
You.

Be-Longing

Andrea La Sonde Anastos

Let me be-longing.

Let me be-longing for the kin-dom of all:

all breathing beings,

all mineral beings,

all sentient beings within the earth,

on the earth, above the earth.

Let me be-longing for a right-sized spirit,

a soul that yearns for with rather than over.

Let me be-longing for deeper wisdom than self,

broader wisdom than tribe,

higher wisdom than imagination.

Let me be-longing beyond knowing to unknowing.

Let me be-longing.

Let me be so. Let me be so.

Books

[Strangers in the Land - Exclusion, Belonging, and the Epic Story of the Chinese in America](#)

by Michael Luo. Doubleday. 2025.

Award-winning journalist Luo tells the

story of the tens of thousands of

Chinese, who, beginning in the

mid-nineteenth century, migrated to a

distant land they called Gum

Shan—Gold Mountain. Americans

initially welcomed them, but, as their

numbers grew, horrific episodes of racial terror

erupted on the Pacific coast. Federal lawmakers

enacted legislation aimed at excluding Chinese

laborers, the first time the U.S. barred a people based

on their race. The Chinese became the country's

earliest undocumented immigrants. Only in 1965 did

America's gates swing open to people like Luo's

parents, immigrants from Taiwan. Now there are

more than twenty-two million people of Asian

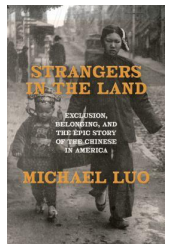
descent in the U.S. and yet the "stranger" label

remains. Drawing on archives from across the

country and written with style and sweep, *Strangers*

in the Land is a revelatory and unforgettable

American story.



[*The Gift of Not Belonging: How Outsiders Thrive in a World of Joiners*](#)

by Rami Kaminski. Little, Brown Spark, 2025.
Alongside the introvert and the extrovert, Kaminski explores the otrovert personality—someone who feels like an outsider in any group. Otroverts are not natural born joiners. Unlike introverts, they are not shy or quiet, and do not quickly tire from one-on-one socializing. Yet in large groups they feel uncomfortable, alienated, and alone. Unlike those who have been excluded or marginalized, otroverts are embraced. Yet they never feel like they truly belong.

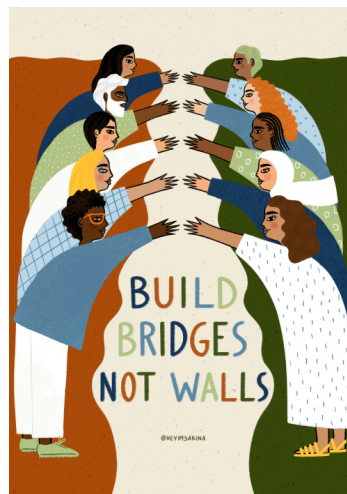
When you have no affinity for a particular group, your self-worth is not conditioned on the group’s approval. You can enjoy deep connection in individual relationships without the obligation to follow the rules the group follows, or care about what the group cares about. Best of all, you know of no other way to think or be, other than for yourself. *The Gift of Not Belonging* urges otroverts to embrace their unique gifts, and equips them with the knowledge and tools to thrive in a communal world.

[*A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*](#)

by Parker Palmer, Wiley, 2004.
What leads us to live divided lives that defy our own sense of identity and integrity? When we do, what price do we and the world pay? How can we recover the wholeness that is our birthright gift? Palmer examines the forces that deflect us from the soul’s true north and gives us the tools we need to regain our bearings. In the Anderson Library: 248.4 P

[*Belong: Find Your People, Create Community and Live a More Connected Life*](#)

by Radha Agrawal. Workman, 2018.
Agrawal offers every reader a blueprint to find their people and build and nurture community, because connectedness—as more and more studies show—is our key to happiness, fulfillment, and success.



[*Sakina Saïdi for OBI
x Fine Acts*](#)

[*Eternal Echoes: Celtic Reflections on Our Yearning to Belong*](#)

by John O’Donohue. HarperPerennial, 2000.
An explanation of our longing to belong in relation to awakening, presence and absence, prisons we choose to live in, suffering, and prayer, which O’Donohue describes as a bridge between longing and belonging. “There is a deep need in each of us to belong to some cluster of friendship and affinity in which the games of impression and power are at a minimum, and we can allow ourselves to be seen as we really are, we can express what we really believe and can be challenged thoroughly,” he writes. “This is how we grow; it is where we learn to see who we are, what our needs are, and the unsuspecting effect our thinking and presence have on other lives.”
In the Anderson Library, 128 O.

[*Belonging: Remembering Ourselves Home*](#)

by Toko-pa Turner, Belonging, Her Own Room, 2017.
This inviting book beckons the reader to explore belonging as a way of being that far exceeds participation in a specific (finite) group—however large. It is a call to reclaim our belonging within the universe itself and within our bodies/minds/spirits. Turner asks, “What if belonging isn’t a place at all?” She proposes that it is a skill that we have forgotten, but can relearn.

[The Power of Bridging: How to Build a World Where We All Belong](#)

by John A. Powell. St. Martin's, 2024.

Powell, the founding Director of the Othering and Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley, offers a framework for building cohesion and solidarity between disparate beliefs and backgrounds. Bridging is more than a discrete list of actions to follow—it's a mindset we can develop to help us foster belonging and connection. One of the key elements of the bridging practice includes embracing "belonging" as one of our core human needs—we all want to feel seen, valued, and appreciated just as we are. A Bush Foundation Book Read. In the Unity Anderson Library: 179.9 P. See also the video of MPR's event/interview with Powell.

Children's Books

[My Wandering Dreaming Mind](#)

by Merriam Sarcia Saunders (illus Tammie Lyon), Magination Press, 2020

This lovely book about a neurodivergent child who can't seem to 'stay with the program'. She feels that she doesn't belong, until her parents help her reframe her mental process with positive words (imagination, amazing, curious, kind).

[Origins](#)

by Nat Cardoza (trans. Farnes and Benitex-James), Origins, Red Comet Press, 2023.

This extraordinarily beautiful book introduces 22 indigenous cultures across the globe and describes their understanding of their deep belonging to the earth itself. Many of these are small societies of less than 10,000 persons which experience belonging to community in a way beyond our familiar experience. The illustrations each show a young person in the context of their geography and culture.



[You Belong Here](#)

by M.H. Clark. Illustrated by Isabelle Arsenault. Compendium, 2016.

In this beautifully illustrated, lyrical book, children are assured that, just like all creatures, they belong right where they are.

Movies and TV

[Lars and the Real Girl](#)



Directed by Craig Gillespie, 2007. In this charming film, a church community embraces a delusional man's relationship with a sex doll, transforming his profound loneliness into belonging.

[Join or Die](#)

Rebecca and Pete Davis (directors), 2023

In this Emmy-nominated feature documentary, follow the half-century story of America's civic unraveling through the journey of legendary social scientist Robert Putnam, whose groundbreaking "Bowling Alone" research into America's decades-long decline in community connections could hold the answers to our democracy's present crisis.

Flanked by influential fans and scholars—from Priya Parker, Pete Buttigieg, and Surgeon General Vivek Murthy to Jane McAlevey, Hillary Clinton, and Eddie Glaude Jr.—as well as inspiring groups building community in neighborhoods across the country, join Bob as he explores three urgent civic questions: What makes democracy work? Why is American democracy in crisis? And, most importantly... What can we do about it?

[Rental Family](#)

Directed by Hikari, 2025.

Struggling to find purpose, an American actor lands an unusual gig with a Japanese agency to play stand-in roles for strangers. As he immerses himself in his clients' worlds, including their religious rituals, he begins to form genuine bonds that blur the lines between performance and reality. Confronting the moral complexities of his work, he

rediscovers purpose, belonging, and the beauty of human connection.

[Between the Temples](#)

Directed by Nathan Silver, 2024.

A cantor in a crisis of faith finds his world turned upside down when his grade school music teacher re-enters his life as his new adult Bat Mitzvah student. Broadly described as a behavioral comedy; it's not a critique of organized religion but an empathetic study of how people constantly organize and reorganize their relationships to religion—and within that, their relationships to themselves and one another, in response to constantly fluctuating cross-currents of need, desire, and circumstance.”

[“Somebody, Somewhere”](#)

Comedy drama television series on HBO Max starring Bridget Everett and Jeff Hiller, 2022-24. Sam Miller is a 40-something Kansas native who reluctantly returns to her hometown following the death of her sister. There she is forced to face the challenges of loss and grief with the help of a community of quirky outsiders drawn together by a shared desire to find meaning and belonging in the unlikeliest of places, including church.

Videos

[“Belonging: The Science of Creating Connection and Bridging Divides with Geoffrey Cohen”](#)

Geoffrey Cohen, Stanford Reunion Homecoming 2023. Dr. Cohen (author of *Belonging: The Science of Creating Connection and Bridging Divides*) describes his research on three practices that increase belonging: 1) expressing belief in potential, 2) sharing stories of adversity, and 3) affirming values.

[“Power of Belonging Spoken Word”](#)

Janae Johnson, May 18, 2021.

“Here we are with all of this power with this new language bending our tongue with this ability to transform each other’s experience, so how do you gift people the power of yourself and allow them to do the same; how do you find all the islands

amongst you and attempt to build a bridge you know? Sometimes magic is about swallowing your own social anxiety and other times magic is as simple as an imperfect yet timely, “Hello. Would you like to join me?” Here we are with all of this power so I invite you to impress me”

[“Author and Activist john a. powell on 'The Power of Bridging'”](#) MPR, December 2, 2025.

Scholar and author john a. powell talks about his new book, “The Power of Bridging.” In a deeply divided world, what can be done to create a sense of belonging for everyone? Note: The book is in the Unity Anderson Library.

Art

Bead Soup

Rev. Andrea LaSonde Anastos



Belonging within, among, and beyond. All the aspects of self, all the aspects of relationship, all the aspects of the unfamiliar and unknown are belonging. Bead soup (for bead workers) is the bowl filled with all the left-overs and one-offs, the beautiful and the pedestria

Music

Playlists on YouTube Music are free to access without a Google account, though more features are available with an account. Playlists on Spotify are free to access though sign-in to Spotify via a Google, Apple or a Spotify account is required. Click the title link to access the playlists or music videos.

[Belonging Playlist. YouTube Music](#)

Lisa Brosseau

We Are Family – Sister Sledge, We Are Family
Get Together – The Youngbloods, This is The Youngbloods
Everybody – Ingrid Michaelson, Everybody
Crowded Table – The Highwomen, Crowded Table
People Have the Power – Patti Smith, Dream of Life
Friendship Train – Gladys Knight & The Pips, Ultimate Collection
Olooh, A War Dance for Peace – Kasai Allstars
Stand By Me – Ben E. King, Don't Play That Song
You'll Never Walk Alone – Elvis Presley, How Great Thou Art
O ye who taste that love is sweet – Eleanor Daley & The Oxford Choir, Breath of Son



[Belong \(Take 1\), Spotify.](#)

Kevin Ward

Belong – R.E.M.
You Belong to Me – Elvis Costello & The Attractions
Nina Cried Power – Hozier with Mavis Staples
Shelter from the Storm – Bob Dylan
Home Home Home – Pokey LaFarge
Friendship Train – Gladys Knight & the Pips
I Wish You Were Here – Alpha Blondy
Open Arms – Sza, Travis Scott
Revival – Allman Brothers
This is Where I Belong – The Kinks
Belong Together (Sped Up) – Lucky Socks
Where We Belong – Passion Pit
This Must Be the Place – Talking Head



For more information:

- Visit the [Spiritual Practice page on the Unity Church website.](#)
- Learn more about the [Double Helix Model of Faith Formation.](#)
- Please contact [Phillipa Anastos](#), Membership Coordinator and Program Assistant

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