

Sin

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.

"I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate..."

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want."

In the New (or Second) Testament, Paul begins this lament in his letter to the Romans by discussing his behavior. Judaism, in common with Shinto and Sunni Islam (among others) are behavior-based theologies which are practiced within corporate structures where the individual has substantial power to affect the commonweal. We know this is equally true for Unitarian Universalists or atheists or any other group.

Paul understands that his behavior does not exist in a vacuum. But he also accepts that he is unable to be in perfect alignment and he continues, "... if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me." Since he cannot consistently control what he does and what he refrains from doing, there must be something within him that is broken, unraveled, sundered (the Germanic root word from which we derive sin) — that disconnects his behavior from what he believes, what he knows and values. He does not say that he, himself, is born broken, but that he is giving "life room" to something that warps his behavior.

Unitarian Universalists have historically been resistant to what we consider an out-sized concept of sin we have inherited from our Christian heritage. We have been particularly resistant to the doctrine of *original sin* and any belief that we are essentially sinful beings. In the process, we often dismiss out of hand the idea that sin

or brokenness can entrench itself so deeply in our soul (spirit, life force) that it *functions* as a part of our being, and is no longer merely a result of a mistaken action.

With Anne Frank, many Unitarian Universalists choose to proclaim, "In spite of everything, I still believe in the inherent goodness of humanity," which is consonant with our Universalist affirmation of the final harmony of all souls with the Divine. But Anne Frank's belief in inherent goodness, by definition, implies there is also badness; our Universalist affirmation of final harmony assumes at least a temporary disharmony in this moment, right here and now. Paying attention to our experiences would lead us to accept that free will includes the right to will evil as fully as it enables us to will truth and sanctity.

So, we are left with Paul's conundrum: why do we fail so often to live fully into our deepest values, as individuals and as communities? Hebrew has several words that describe falling short of what we know to be good: *rasha* (wickedness), *chata* (miss the mark), *avon* (iniquity), *shagag* (err), *pasha* (rebel or trespass), and *taah* (wander away). In the Old (First) Testament, falling short is not merely an accident or failure to seek the good, it is a deliberate choice to head for a target that we know to be wrong. We do this when we are apathetic, when we allow the means to justify ends that don't harm ourselves, when we make a bad choice because it is comfortable rather than challenging.

Of course, being inherently good, and repeatedly choosing behavior that is not good are not mutually exclusive, but there comes a point when we need

to consider when behavior actually begins to determine character. How long does it take for the practice of certain choices to become our default, to become so deeply graven in our synapses and neural pathways that we engage in them automatically?

The good news is that we can change behaviors which are (after all) dependent on neural pathways. Just as we initially establish them, so we can establish different ones. The hard news is that it takes conscious choice to do so. And that conscious choice requires naming what we find unworthy and wish to change, naming it clearly enough that we no longer deny, ignore, or collude with it.

If we right-size the concept of sin, it becomes a gift of grace, inviting us to realign our UU and personal principles with our actions. It invites us to pause and reassess all those expedient choices we have made, those means we have justified, and consider whether we may actually have a worthy option in this situation, even if it is hard. And it invites us to remember that corporate brokenness depends on the complicit brokenness of individuals, including ourselves.

*By Andrea La Sonde Anastos on behalf of this month's theme team:
Ahmed Anzaldúa, Drew Danielson,
Tom Duke, Ray Hommeyer, KP Hong,
and Laura Park*

Sin Theme Resources

For further reflection on this theme, a variety of resources are listed in this month's Chalice Circle packet available at www.unityunitarian.org/chalice-circles.html and by request from karen@unityunitarian.org.

INTERIM REFLECTIONS / THE WHEEL OF LIFE



Interim Reflections

The fundamentalist church of my childhood fed me a steady diet of sin. Week after week, I heard in Sunday School lessons and sermons that all of us were sinful, hopelessly mired in evil, and nothing we did could make things better. Though the church offered us the choice of salvation from sin, I often concluded that the sin messages carried far more energy and conviction than the salvation messages.

So when I found the Unitarian Universalist church and heard its very different message about the goodness of humanity, how our lives were set from birth on a trajectory of growth, I responded enthusiastically. A church where I heard every week positive perspectives on the human experience seemed to me infinitely more inspiring than those dispiriting messages of my childhood church.

But much to my surprise, in time I came to miss the sin talk — not because I enjoyed it (I didn't, ever) but because it was a way of recognizing that we humans do carry shadows in us, a capacity for evil right there alongside our capacity for good. I struggled to find some UU way of addressing that dilemma, of honestly reflecting on how our lives can go terribly wrong, how we might set about changing unhelpful behaviors, repairing relationships that have been broken. I saw the unfortunate result of insisting on only positive talk in our congregations when we had no way to hold one another accountable for times when everything fell apart and people were hurt.

As we enter a month of worship focused on sin, I find myself grateful for this church where sin is neither an unhealthy preoccupation nor a subject strenuously avoided. Being able to reflect on sin brings with it the gift of being able to enter deeply into covenantal relationships and being able to repair those relationships and restore the covenant when it is broken. Being able to reflect on sin means we have ways to look at our complicity in sustaining racist systems and, with that consideration, move towards change individually and collectively. We need not stay stuck in sin — but ignoring it is not our only option.

In faith, hope, and love,
Rev. Dr. Kathy Hurt

The Wheel of Life

In Memoriam

Gretchen Kreuter

May 7, 1934 – February 1, 2022

Jim Neher

December 4, 1935 –

February 15, 2022

In Celebration

Eira Nichols Landgraf born one more redeemer

January 20, 2022, to parents Katrina Nichols and Jess Landgraf

Kenji Benjamin Foster-Walters born one more redeemer

February 1, 2022, to parents Sara and Nick Foster-Walters

Flowers for Worship

If you would like to provide flowers for Sunday worship, contact Martha Tilton at 651-228-1456 x105 or martha@unityunitarian.org.

MidAmerica Regional Assembly 2022

MidAmerica Regional Assembly 2022 is now open for registration!

Saturday, April 30 • 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Details and registration: uua.org/midamerica/ra/2022



This year's keynote speaker is social justice educator, storyteller and speaker, CB Beal! This event includes worship, the annual business meeting, a keynote address, conversation, and fellowship.

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SUNDAY SERVICES / OFFERING RECIPIENTS

Join us in-person at 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. each week for Sunday services. Masks are required for in-person worship. The 9:00 a.m. service is livestreamed, please use the links below to access the stream.

March 6: *Is That What I Really Want?*

Livestream: https://youtu.be/oz_kqm-12Oc

Spiritual traditions look towards our desires as the part of us that gets us into trouble, not because desires are wrong in and of themselves, but because desires need shaping in order to be healthy and faithful. Rev. Dr. Kathy Hurt, worship associate Rich Lau, and director of music Ahmed Anzaldúa explore the many kinds of desires we carry, and how to shape those desires towards what we really want.

Musicians: Unity Singers

March 13: *Original Sin / Original Blessing*

Livestream: https://youtu.be/X_FoH2Qg9G4

Morality, justice, punishment, salvation — the whole history of sin is a messy, muddy misunderstanding. Can our Universalist and Unitarian forebearers help us clear things up? Are grace and mercy our only hope of redemption or are there ways in which we can “save” ourselves? Really, we’ll start with the question of, “What even is *sin*?” Join Rev. Shay MacKay, worship associate Merrill Aldrich, and director of music Ahmed Anzaldúa in a journey through our history (and future) of sin.

Musicians: Unity Choir

March 20: *Saved From Ourselves*

Livestream: <https://youtu.be/bDKxclUplU>

What is it in us that gets us into trouble, that drives us towards behavior that might be called sinful? And do we need in some sense to be saved, or transformed, or enlightened, in order to no longer get enmeshed in trouble, in sin? Rev. Dr. Kathy Hurt, director of music Ahmed Anzaldúa, and worship associate Brian Newhouse wrestle with the challenge of aligning our intention to do right with our tendency to drift into doing wrong.

Musicians: Unity Choir

March 27: *Forgive Them, For They Know Not What They Do*

Livestream: <https://youtu.be/QhmvyEIDqpE>

We end this monthlong focus on sin, necessarily, by reflecting on forgiveness. How do we make our wrongs right, restore relationships broken by sin, forgive ourselves and others? Rev. Dr. Kathy Hurt, director of music Ahmed Anzaldúa, and worship associate Jen Welsh lift up the need for forgiveness that we all face, all life long.

Musicians: Women's Ensemble

Seventy percent of our Sunday offering is given to a community non-profit recipient and thirty percent supports the Community Outreach Ministry at Unity Church. Donations are gratefully accepted online at <https://bit.ly/sundayoffering>.

March 6: RECLAIM

RECLAIM offers affirming mental health support for queer and trans youth enabling them to reclaim their lives from oppression in all of its forms. Its outreach includes counseling, integrative health care, advocacy, and collaboration with public health agencies. RECLAIM has created a specific outreach to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) queer and trans youth who are caught in the intersection of multiple power systems. This collection is dedicated to housing and food security for queer and trans youth who experience disproportionately high rates of violence and harassment. Unity Church member Finn Schneider is an advocate for RECLAIM.

March 13: Housing Justice Center

Using legal advocacy, impact litigation, policy analysis, research, and community education Housing Justice Center works to encourage the preservation and production of affordable housing, and the protection of the right of all people who need affordable places to call home. This collection will support HJC’s Renters Reclaim the Record project. This outreach offers no-cost legal assistance to renters who have been denied rental housing due to inequitable screening processes, the consequences of which often span generations, widening racial housing disparities. Unity Church member Dayna Kennedy works with HJC.

March 20: Eastside Athletics

Eastside Athletics was created to provide low-income and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) youth with traveling club experiences. Dedicated parent volunteers offer these youngsters life-altering opportunities to travel, train, and play at highly competitive levels in local, regional, and national sporting events. This collection will cover gym rental, team uniforms, travel, and tournament fees. Unity Church member Jane Prince works closely with the leadership of Eastside Athletics.

March 27: Black Home Birth Initiative

Black Home Birth Initiative (BHBI), founded by St. Paul midwife Britt Jackson, is a community-sponsored fund that covers full or partial home birth fees. Black birthing moms have extremely limited access to home birth due to lack of access to Black midwives and financial and insurance barriers. The total fee for prenatal, birth, postpartum, and lactation support is \$5500. This collection will help make that more accessible for a local family. Unity Church members Katrina Nichols and Jess Landgraf volunteer with BHBI.

Out of Right Relationship

Jess Landgraf, Trustee



Sin. Like many fellow UUs, I know this is a troublesome concept for me. I see myself as a good person, worthy of agency and love — perhaps your self-assessment is similar? And if I extend this idea outward, I affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person (First Principle of Unitarian Universalists). I am also a new parent, and I can see only

wonder in the embodiment of our tiny child. I have a hard time viewing any human as automatically needing saving before we, from the outside, deem them worthy of honor.

Rereading that last sentence as I'm writing it, I can't help but see white dominant culture coming through. We operate in a society structured around one group of people having deemed another group as necessarily, from birth, worthless of honor, dignity, sovereignty, and agency. I may not believe in the (gendered) concept of "original sin" as preached by my mainline Protestant denomination of origin, yet we are born into the structural sin of racism. My very pale-skinned child of Northern European genetics has privileges not bestowed to children of different melanated genetics. As I affirm the Second Principle of Unitarian Universalists (justice, equity, and compassion in human relations), racism puts me (and Unity Church) into unjust, inequitable, and uncompassionate relationships with other humans, regardless of my/our intentions as good people.

I also affirm respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part (Seventh Principle of Unitarian Universalists). Yet, as an American, I know that our society's energy consumption patterns (transportation, agriculture, utilities, etc.) put the health and wellbeing of lower-income neighborhoods, pollinators, and so many other endangered species into an unjust hierarchical relationship. Unless we act structurally, we do more than disrespect this interdependent web of all existence — and we adults are making an irreversible decision into what kind of world our young people are born.

I affirm the Third Principle of Unitarian Universalists — acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations. We are all born into the structures and institutions that govern our society, and I work to accept myself when I fail to act in right relationship and extend grace to others for the same. We annually have the reminder that growing spiritually includes acknowledging individually and in community where and when we have erred, so we can atone and begin again in love. As we head toward the last third of this interim year, we have further opportunity to identify when and where our congregation has erred toward each other and to the wider web of all existence — and we thereafter have the opportunity to begin again in love.

Update from the Ministerial Search Team

Marg Walker, on behalf of the Ministerial Search Team:

Avi Viswanathan, Betsy Hearn, Mary Baremore, Morgan France-Ramirez, Pauline Eichten, Lia Rivamonte, Jake Rueter, and Dan Huelster

As part of our preparatory work for the ministerial search, the UUA asked the MST to prepare an extensive Congregational Record. This document answered 56 questions about our history, organization, and congregational life. It will be available for all to read when our process has concluded.

One of the questions that intrigued us was this: **Describe the work within the congregation which is slow, stuck, or not attended to.** Our approach was to report on what we learned from the Listening Sessions last fall. This is what we heard — a partial list, but we think a good one:

1. Creating a community where BIPOC and LGBTQ people feel genuine welcome and belonging. Many congregants who are not in those groups feel all is well and we're "past" any exclusionary history, but those who identify tell a different story in which they feel marginalized and not invited into circles of belonging and leadership.
2. Integrating youth engagement through intergenerational worship and other contributions. Children and youth, as well as their parents who teach Religious Education classes, are physically separate and virtually invisible to the rest of the congregation on Sunday mornings.
3. Expanding and encouraging leadership and shared ministry from all quadrants of our community, rather than the "inner circle" or "the usual suspects" identified by top leadership.
4. Extending the concept and delivery of pastoral care, as a shared responsibility of the congregation, and extending that care to members across all ages, not only to elders.
5. Completing work on updating Unity's history since 1972. This project was suspended for the duration of our ministerial transition.
6. Creating authentic welcome and belonging for all, and working to facilitate connection for visitors and new attendees. We are a large church, where visitors and new attendees can feel lost and unconnected.
7. Developing a process for discerning issues that the church will support in a public way.
8. Addressing the needs of people with disabilities, and supporting parents who have children with disabilities.

We found it useful to step back from pandemic preoccupations and think about our church as a whole, and our vision for being together in right relationship as we work toward our Ends. What would be on your list?

To learn more about the work and process of the Ministerial Search Team, please visit their webpage at <https://www.unityunitarian.org/ministerial-transition.html>.

BELOVED COMMUNITY NEWS

Nurturing Mutual Belonging: A Renewed Focus of the Welcome Team

Mary Pickard, Welcome Team member



Being respected and being treated well are not the same as having a feeling of belonging. -- Barb Cederberg

The Welcome Team — otherwise known as greeters or ushers — is reinventing itself at Unity Church. It might not seem obvious. We still hand out orders of service, pass collection plates, and clean up the pews after service. The transformation is happening in our hearts and we hope you will notice in your heart.

The shift is rooted in the church's desire to become more antiracist and multicultural, to create the Beloved Community, moving the emphasis away from the tactical to the relational to fulfill the Welcome Team's new mission, "Nurturing Mutual Belonging."

"Welcome Team work is a spiritual practice and part of our covenant to provide a continuum of care here at Unity," says Madeline Summers, team coordinator. "Nurturing mutual belonging starts with us as individuals — our own sense of belonging, knowing who we are, what we're passionate about, and how we might be perceived by others. Then, it extends to our practice among team members."

Each team now meets 30 minutes before the service to check in, sometimes with a reading or reflection, so members can be grounded and know each other more deeply. By nurturing belonging within each team, we can better nurture belonging beyond to congregants.

More focus is being given to interacting with people, so Welcome Team members aren't going to be found behind tables anymore. Rather, we are circulating in the Parish Hall engaging in conversation.

That's not always easy, says Welcome Team member Barb Cederberg, a self-proclaimed introvert. "We want to do things right. We may not do it right, so it inhibits us from trying. How do we have the courage to try and live with the discomfort? Unity Church members

have so much generosity, if mistakes are made, we can overcome."

Barb is passionate about the work. "I can feel where I belong and I can feel where I don't belong," says Barb. "Being respected and being treated well are not the same as having a feeling of belonging. I worked in corporate America for many years. I did not acknowledge my spouse, Judy, or that we had children. Nurturing belonging is a feeling of acceptance of self and others. At Unity, I can be myself. How do I encourage others to be themselves?"

"Mutual belonging is more complicated than passing the collection plate or picking up Kleenex boxes," says Jim Oberly, another Welcome Team member. "I'm an old white guy. I'm conscious of that. You know the images of deacons in the old churches — conveying an air of authority as if to say, 'your money is safe with us.' I used to wear a coat and tie. I dress differently now — a sweater and slacks."

Continues Jim, "When people enter the church, we greeters are likely to make misinformed judgments based on how someone looks. We need to stay open and curious. I do my best to help visitors figure us out — what might be expected during a service, where things are located, how to get more information — and I try to share something of myself in hopes they will share something of themselves with me."

Nurturing mutual belonging isn't just for visitors. "It is a good direction for all the groups we have at church," says Barb. "We should increase our awareness of how the interactions are among us. If someone is standing alone in the Parish Hall, start up a conversation." She recalls when she was standing in line to greet the ministers and the woman ahead of her looked very sad. "I asked her if she



was OK. She had just lost her husband two years earlier — about the time I lost Judy — so we got talking and now we're good friends."

Jim has seen the value of mutual belonging in other aspects of his church volunteer work. In recent months, he and his wife have been escorting elderly women to church on Sundays. "As so many people came up to greet and fuss over them, I saw the elders come alive! It made them so happy. How many friends and admirers they have!"

I guess that's proof that whether we're on a Welcome Team or not, all congregants are part of nurturing mutual belonging. If you are interested in joining the Welcome Team, contact Madeline Summers (madeline@unityunitarian.org).

All church members, including Welcome Team members, are encouraged to take the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a tool to help build our self-knowledge so we can develop our personal and congregational capacity for welcoming all. Further, as we move forward in the spirit of transformation, Welcome Teams will be engaging with the Double Helix Model of Faith Formation and Antiracist Multicultural Work (<https://bit.ly/uchelix>) to deepen our practice of welcome.

WELCOME NEWCOMERS



Welcome Words

Laura Park, Director of Membership and Hospitality

In her wonderful book *After the Good News: Progressive Faith Beyond Optimism*, Rev. Nancy McDonald Ladd provides a theological perspective on sin I find quite moving. She talks about how the Universalist view on sin has been misunderstood, that we've only been telling half the story. "We've often told it as a story that is all about us — about the fundamental goodness and inevitable progress of human beings . . . We've neglected to give credit where credit is due . . . Instead of focusing on how pure and perfect people were, [Hosea] Ballou [the great 19th century Universalist theologian] taught that sin was finite while God was infinite . . . Basically, God could work with whatever raw materials He was given to work with, even when those materials were imperfect, slightly dumpy, and occasionally weird — like us. . . [Universalists] simply believed that God's love was more powerful than our deadlier proclivities."

Even though I need to translate "God" to something that aligns better with my personal theology (Spirit of Life and Love Moving in All is where I go), I am moved by the idea that there is a collective source that can work with my flaws and my failings and transform them in the mutuality of religious community into something that can heal us together. Rev. McDonald Ladd says that "It is easy to imagine that the work of the church is to cultivate our own souls so that we might bind up what is broken among other people. It is so much harder to acknowledge what is and has always been broken within ourselves." The idea that there's a place for that brokenness at church feels like a first step on the path to wholeness. A path less lonely because we walk it together.

Whether you're looking for a new perspective on sin, or the healing power of mutuality in religious community, or something different, I'm here to help answer your questions about congregational life and the pathways you might explore to know the church better and deepen your spiritual life. Contact me at laura@unityunitarian.org or 651-228-1456 x110. I look forward to getting to know you!

Welcome New Member

Nancy Jambor

I have been a professional Life Coach for 20 years. In 2014, I started designing and leading retreats for women. I love helping women to follow their dreams and live courageously. My passions include the work I do, spending time in nature, and my family. I am the mother of two adult children, Jennifer and Matthew, and grandmother of 12-year-old Ana, the love of my life.



Pathway to Membership Classes

Explore a deeper connection to Unity Church and the commitments and opportunities of membership. Contact Laura Park at laura@unityunitarian.org or 651-228-1456 x110 with questions or to participate.

Finding Yourself at Unity • Sundays • 10:15-11:15 a.m.

Gannett Room in-person and online at bit.ly/fyonline
Finding Yourself at Unity includes eight classes that you can attend in any order to better understand how Unity Church supports our faith journeys, our work to build Beloved Community, and our efforts to bless the world. February offerings:

March 6: Worship & Liturgical Year

March 13: Pastoral Care

March 20: Religious Education for Children, Youth and Adults

March 27: Membership 101

Committing to Unity • Thursday, March 31 • 7:00 p.m.

- *Develop personal practice to help you find and keep your balance.*
- *Develop the skills of intimacy that let you go deep quickly with strangers.*
- *Take the compassion that rises from doing the first two and use it to bless the world.*

This is how Unity Church talks about its expectations of membership. Does the invitation into this ongoing work resonate with you? Are you ready to make the membership commitment? This session, for people ready to become members, explores the deeper meanings and expectations of membership and shared ministry. It offers time to reflect on the meaning of generosity and how you can discover the places in your life where the world's need meets the gifts and joy you have to offer. The class concludes with a ceremony as participants sign the membership book and officially join the church.

Mentoring at Unity:

A Path to Deeper Connection

Would you welcome having a guide to congregational life at Unity Church? Request a mentor! Your mentor will meet with you at least once a month face-to-face and be available for ongoing questions and advice. You can decide together what connection would be most helpful. You might attend Sunday services together or meet to discuss Unitarian Universalism and your spiritual journeys, or attend a church event together, or find another way to connect. Each pair makes a commitment to work together for at least six months. If you have questions, or would like to request a mentor, please email Laura Park, Director of Membership and Hospitality, laura@unityunitarian.org.

CONGREGATIONAL CARE



If the pandemic is getting you down...

Rev. Karen Hering, Associate Minister

As we cross the two-year anniversary of the pandemic, our bodies — attuned to the seasons as they are — might be re-experiencing the shock and loss of early spring two years ago, when we began our sheltering in place. We might notice the return of uncomfortable emotions — fear or anxiety, grief or weariness — in what is sometimes called the anniversary effect, likely compounded by the fact that the pandemic is still with us.

Each of us has stories to tell about our own pandemic losses, large and small. For the vaccinated and the unvaccinated, for those now gathering, masked, in person and those still sheltering at home, for those meeting online and those unable or unwilling to share conversation virtually. I don't know anyone who hasn't experienced significant loss of some kind due to the pandemic. Grief and anxiety, despair and fear are all natural responses.

The question is, what will we do with these emotions? Will we answer their call to recognize others' pain too, and to find in our shared losses a community of consolation, support and compassion? Or will we let grief and anxiety, despair and fear shut us down, turning us away from others?

This month, as we explore what sin means in our Unitarian Universalist theology and how we can overcome it, I'm struck by the Germanic root of the word "sin" linking it to "sunder," or an act of separation. How tempting it can be to let the crises of our time — the pandemic or systemic racism, climate change or rising gun violence — separate us from others, further isolated by our own broken-heartedness and despair.

Thankfully many of you are resisting this temptation. You are showing up, online or in person, one on one or in small groups, at church or in the community or from your own homes. You are caring for one another in the endless ways still available to us.

Still, none of us can do this always. That's the beauty of community. We can take turns. So, if you are feeling weighted down by grief or anxiety, by despair or loneliness, remember — you need not carry that weight alone. This community is here for you. Unity's Care Associates are available to accompany you, on the short or long walks of life's more challenging journeys. If you would like a compassionate listener or someone to help break the isolation of this time, send an email to me at karen@unityunitarian.org, call or text the pastoral care line (651-327-0790) or use the form on the website (unityunitarian.org/pastoral-care.html). Or just stay in touch with one another. Let's weather these times together, friends. That's what community is for.

To Request Congregational Care

Do you have a concern or joy you wish to have shared in Sunday worship? Would you like to request a call from the minister or a Care Associate? Can the Helping Hands program support you with meals, rides or other assistance? Please let us know. Use the form online at unityunitarian.org/pastoral-care.html or contact Rev. Karen Hering at karen@unityunitarian.org or 651-228-1456, x109.

Support Groups

Contact Rev. Karen Hering (karen@unityunitarian.org) if you would like to participate in one of these support groups co-facilitated by the Associate Minister and a Care Associate. Groups may meet online or in person. Participants can come for a single session or return to the group as needed.

Families Living with Mental Health Challenges

Support for those who have loved ones living with mental health challenges. Meets the first Saturday of the month at 9:30 a.m.

Caregivers Group

For those supporting others as part-time or full-time caregivers of loved ones. Meets the third Thursday of the month at noon.

Living With Grief Group

A supportive space for people navigating the many stages of grief and loss. Meets the third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 p.m.



Helping Hands

The Helping Hands programs depend on church members to provide meals, rides, and other important practical assistance. Volunteers also bake and serve treats for memorial service receptions, and others knit comfort shawls that are given to people experiencing illness or loss. These programs will be recruiting additional volunteers this year, watch for more information or email Rev. Karen Hering at karen@unityunitarian.org to indicate your interest.

WELLSPRING WEDNESDAY

Wellspring Wednesday gathers a multigenerational church community Wednesday evenings to nourish right and holy relationship among us and deepen our life of faith grounded in spiritual practice and antiracist, multicultural work. The Wellspring Wednesday experience includes:

- Sharing meaningful time and, when the requirement to mask in the building is lifted, nourishing food together.
- Brief multigenerational worship in the Ames chapel (on pause until we return to eating dinner together).
- Opportunities to play, learn, and practice with one another. See upcoming programs below!

March 2

Congregation Book Read Discussion *The Seed Keeper* by Diane Wilson

In-person at Unity Church (Robbins Parlor) and on Zoom

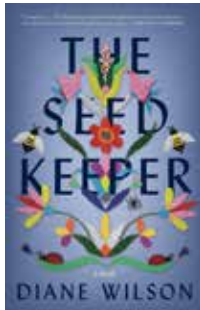
Register: <https://bit.ly/UCUBookRead22>

Join us for a

discussion of this year's Congregation Book Read: *The Seed Keeper* by Diane Wilson. All are welcome whether you have read the book or not yet.

This is the story of Rosalie Iron Wing,

of growing up, facing the life she has chosen, and of listening to her ancestors, taking courage from their forethought in saving seeds and from their resilience despite trauma and terrorism brought upon them by white men. It's beautifully told and will lift all who enter its pages. Reading guide: <https://bit.ly/22BookReadGuide>.



March 9

A Spiritual Practice to Feed Your Soul: Lectio Divina

Register: <https://bit.ly/Lectio21-22>

Following a centuries-old Benedictine spiritual practice of contemplative reading, meet online to share in Lectio Divina. In this invitation to receive the wisdom and gifts of poetry, each session engages the group in hearing a particular poem read aloud multiple times, listening for "what is found there." Rather than analyzing the poem, group members lift up what they heard and how the poem spoke to them. Led by Shelley Butler, this practice is a rich way to receive the gifts of poetry in a small group setting. Drop-in attendance is welcome. Also available fourth Sundays at 4:30 p.m., see page 13.

March 16

The Hiss of Sin Open Page Writing Session

Register: <https://bit.ly/hisssssss>

Sin is a thorny topic for religious liberals, so we often avoid it, focusing instead on our more positive human potential. But as James Luther Adams said, this ostrich method isn't very helpful. In this session, led by Rev. Karen Hering, we'll pull our heads from the sand to consider the biblical definition of sin as a "hardened heart." What hardens our hearts today? And how might we keep our hearts open and softened to the world around us?

Session One: Talking with Your Kids about Race, Skin Color, and Equity

Register: <https://bit.ly/UCUFamilyTalk>

Why do parents need to have conversations about race, skin color, and equity with their young children? How can these topics be approached in everyday conversations? Why does this feel so difficult? Research has shown that children need clear and ongoing adult guidance to internalize values of inclusion, empathy, and antiracism.

Join Jill Chisholm, licensed parenting educator and staff trainer for over 30 years for this two-session offering. You may attend both sessions or just session one. Session one is an overview, session two (on March 23) will focus on skill practice and resource sharing.

Board Game Night

In-person in the Center Room

Open to everyone; kids are welcome with their adult(s)! We'll have a variety of easy to learn board games available for players age 10 and up. Or, bring a favorite board game that you would like to play.

March 23

Abandoning the Mother Tongue

Register: <https://bit.ly/AtMTUCU>

At Unity Church, antiracist multiculturalism and faith formation form a double helix of strong bonds that guide our life of faith. Rev. Dr. Okogyeamon will help us explore these bonds theologically, unpacking racism as a violation of Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship. When racism is a sin, a mother tongue we inherit and perpetuate, how might we work instead at restitution and reconciliation, grounded in a deep love?

Session Two: Talking with Your Kids about Race, Skin Color, and Equity

Register: <https://bit.ly/UCUFamilyTalk>

The first session will be held March 16 (see description at left). The second session will focus on skill practice and resource sharing and is open to all who attended session one.

March 30

Understanding Alzheimers and Dementia with The Alzheimer's Association

Register: <https://bit.ly/UnderstandingAandD>

Alzheimer's disease is not a normal part of aging. Join us to learn about the impact of Alzheimer's, the difference between Alzheimer's and dementia, stages and risk factors, current research and treatments available for some symptoms, and Alzheimer's Association resources.

The 33rd Annual Unity Church Youth Musical Presents

A Fairy Good Friend



Unity's 6th, 7th, and 8th Graders

Written and Directed by Mary Blouin Auffert

Music by Sandy Waterman

Performances

Thursday, March 10 • 7:00 PM

Friday, March 11 • 7:00 PM

Saturday, March 12 • 5:30 PM

In the Sanctuary at Unity Church



Tickets

\$4/children

\$6/adults

\$20/family

Purchase tickets in the Parish Hall on Sundays, and at the door before the performance.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH MINISTRY

Affordable Housing Victories!

Bring It Home, Minnesota had its first hearing in the state House on February 15. This initiative would create universal housing vouchers in Minnesota for everyone who qualifies. Wouldn't it be remarkable to break the logjam within Section 8 housing by eliminating voucher waiting lists? Imagine every Minnesotan having a place to call home. The hearing was a success and the bill will be moving forward. But there are many hurdles ahead. Unity's Affordable Housing Team is busy visiting legislators to shore up support for this bill.

Housing stability is fundamental to resolving many other issues. It affects measurable outcomes at school and in one's health. Many consider housing justice a form of racial justice. If you would like to learn more about the work of Unity's Affordable Housing Team, please contact Dayna Kennedy at daynamelissa@icloud.com.

Obama School Ministry Team

Nancy Heege, Obama School Ministry Team

Early in February we met with Principal Elias Oguz and Assistant Principal Jill Knudsen for an update on the situation at the school. Good news: the numbers of Covid-19 cases were declining and all the teachers were in their classrooms rather than teaching online.

Help needed this spring! Staff would welcome volunteers to come to the playground behind the school during recess periods to assist the teachers. Guidelines and an identifying lanyard will be provided. Contact Nancy Heege at nancyheege672@gmail.com for details.

With the news that the school will be closing in June 2023, it is likely that the school's student and staff populations will be smaller next year. We've been asked to make Staff Appreciation Week, May 2-6, really special this year. Do you have any contacts with food trucks? Ideas for something fun each day of that week? To help with planning, contact Karen Abraham at kabe1260@gmail.com.

Artists, musicians, and others would be welcome this spring to provide one-time activities in art, music, dance, and drama. If you or someone you know might be interested, contact Karen Abraham at kabe1260@gmail.com.

Does your child currently attend, or do you have other connections with, the Montessori program at Cherokee Heights or JJ Hill? The Obama School Team is interested in learning more about these programs that will be merging and then moving to the Obama School building in 2024 or 2025. If so, please contact Pat Christiansen at pj_christiansen@comcast.net.

Support Hallie Q. Brown Food Shelf

During the month of January Unity Church members donated 152 lbs of food and cleaning supplies to Hallie Q. Brown food shelf. Thank you and please continue to help our neighbors by bringing an item for the food shelf each time you come to church!

For March the food shelf is seeking donations of soup, tuna, canned chicken, white and brown rice, pasta sauce, canned and diced tomatoes, and tomato sauce.



Gun Sense

Ministry Team

Joan Duke, Team Member

Sensible gun laws that would require background checks for purchases and establish a process to remove guns temporarily from those who pose an extreme risk to themselves or others have been attempted in bills previously brought before the Minnesota legislature. Similar bills this year may not even get hearings because of other issues deemed more pressing and/or the thought that they would be unlikely to garner enough votes to pass both chambers. That's discouraging. But you can still share your support with your state representatives (even if they are already supportive of sensible gun legislation)!

Information on how to contact your legislators is online at <https://www.gis.lcc.mn.gov/iMaps/districts/>.

In partnership with the Ramsey County Attorney's Office, Unity Church has gun locks available free of charge to any Ramsey County resident. Contact rmbirger@yahoo.com for details.

Stay informed about gun violence and what's being done to make our communities safer by checking out and subscribing to The Trace, a reputable news source that's dedicated to reporting on guns and gun violence and what efforts are being made to change things. Online at <https://www.thetrace.org>.

Community Outreach Ministry

Get connected with Unity's Community Outreach Ministry Teams! For more information or to volunteer with any team or project, please contact the people listed or Rev. Shay MacKay at 651-228-1456 x106 or shay@unityunitarian.org.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH MINISTRY

Black Films Matter

The Black Film Canon series explores Black perspective behind and in front of the camera.

Fridays, March 18 - April 8 • 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Register: <https://bit.ly/BFCanon22>

Black Film Canon (BFC) is a Friday night film series held on Zoom that invites you to view and discuss films written, produced, and created by Black people.

Each session discusses one of four films selected from the list of 50 that *Slate* magazine has dubbed the "Black Film Canon." Rev. Jack Gaede, from White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church and developer of series, notes:

...this isn't just a film study group, but also a chance to dig deeper into [ourselves] in the context of antiracism work. We are watching these movies ... to explore and examine the concepts of race, of whiteness, of racism. We are asking people to look at the films through certain lenses, to notice whiteness and blackness and the way that those concepts are portrayed on screen. And we are especially curious about the way those portrayals have changed through time, which is why we are utilizing a chronological approach to the films that we are watching.

Becky Gonzalez-Campoy, member of Unity Church and student of social transformation at United Theological Seminary, will lead the series at Unity. Participants are asked to commit to the full series to build a deepening understanding and rapport with one another. Participants will view each movie on their own prior to the meeting. Class materials will include viewing information as well as discussion questions and related resources. Films are available online for free or a minimal cost. If financial assistance is needed, please email shay@unityunitarian.org.

BFC is a great learning opportunity for anyone just starting their antiracism journey as well as for those who are already seasoned in this work. For those who have completed the Intercultural Development Inventory, this series can be a useful tool to help meet your personal growth goals. Questions? Contact Becky Gonzalez-Campoy at beckygc83@gmail.com.



Amicus Champions of Change Event

Amicus, the community partner of Unity's Racial and Restorative Justice Team, invites you to their Champions of Change virtual event on Thursday, March 3, from 5:30-6:30 p.m., as they explore how community can be a healing force in our criminal legal system.

For over five decades, the Amicus services of Volunteers of America Minnesota and Wisconsin has been a healing force in our community, reaching out to those reentering society after incarceration by offering support, friendship, and accountability.

The annual Amicus Champions of Change celebration returns this year as a virtual gathering you can attend safely at home. It is free and open to everyone. Presenters from many perspectives will speak on:

- Their own stories of healing through support, connection and second chances
- The current status of Amicus' work to advance community well-being and justice
- The lessons these past two years have taught us about the criminal legal system
- The role individuals can play in supporting second chances and community justice

Learn more and register at: <https://bit.ly/Amicus-Champions>.



Save These Dates

Hey White People, We Have Work to Do!
Moving Forward Together to End Systemic Racism

Truth, Reconciliation, Peace, and Possibility Concert
Friday, May 27 • Unity Church Sanctuary

Pilgrimage from the State Capital to George Floyd Square
Saturday, May 28 • Morning through afternoon

For additional information, visit www.heywhitepeople.org.



LIBRARY-BOOKSTALL / PARISH HALL ARTISTS



New in History, New in Justice

Shelley Butler, Library-Bookstall Team

History and stories are living things, and as such, change over time as new things are discovered, uncovered, or remembered, in the Anishinaabe tradition. Staci Lola Drouillard writes in *Walking the Old Road: A People's History of Chippewa City and the Grand Marais Anishinaabe*:

I find great comfort in knowing that everything changes. Because this means that we all have the opportunity to change the trajectory of our story. Like a river gradually breaking apart an ice dam in the spring, perhaps we can begin to shift the often static and heavily weighted stories of our past by welcoming in the dynamic voices of the people who were often conveniently left out of our region's written history.

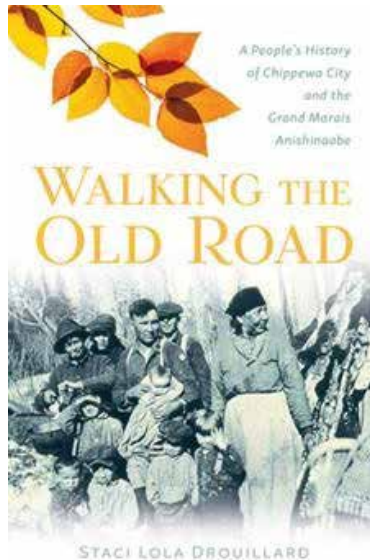
Though not much remains of the 19th century Chippewa City (originally located between Grand Marais and Croftville), it is not forgotten by the native community whose families lived and thrived there. Now, thanks to one of descendants, all of us can know the story of the small native community on the north shore of Lake Superior — a now-familiar story of stolen lands, eminent domain, and broken treaties, but also of a “unique place in terms of cultural identity and the marriage of multiple worldviews.” Drouillard offers us a powerful sense of place, which one must have to find their way back home.

A Project of Unity Church: The Justice Database

Unity's Justice Database is a one-stop resource for books, podcasts, films, history, organizations, government agencies, reports, and more related to a wide net of justice areas: BIPOC, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, environmental, immigration, and criminal justice, as well as antiracism, history, faith-based projects, Civil Rights, and more.

New in the Justice Database

The goal of Justice Arts Coalition is to harness “the transformative power of the arts to reimagine justice.” Collaborations with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated artists serve as a bridge and outlet for creative expression between people inside and outside of prison. Learn more: <https://bit.ly/JusticeData>



Parish Hall Artists

MaryBeth Garrigan and Petra Johnita Lommen



Cast Your Fate to the Moon

The collaboration between MaryBeth Garrigan and Petra Johnita Lommen arose from MaryBeth telling stories from her long history of working with birds in the field. Combined with metaphysics and sacred traditions of iconic bird imagery, MaryBeth's stories suggested visual ideas. In addition to bird stories, the artists are inspired by the mystical feeling of being small in something larger than themselves, such as we might experience when viewing the night sky.

MaryBeth Garrigan served as director of the National Eagle Center from 2000-2010. Before that she worked at The Raptor Center in St. Paul, and with the Midwest and Cornell peregrine falcon recovery programs. After not painting for 25 years, Garrigan returned to painting and collaborated with Ms. Lommen on this series of raptor-inspired Paintings.

Petra Johnita Lommen received her B.F.A. (1979) and M.F.A. (1984) from the University of Minnesota. She has worked in both art education and science education. Ms. Lommen's art explores creative feminine energy through archetypal themes, referencing observations of nature, the beauty of the night sky, and the scientific disciplines of astronomy, cosmology, paleontology, and geology.



Congregation Book Read Discussion: March 2

See page 8 for details!

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE / FELLOWSHIP

Sangha Practice

At the heart of Buddhist practice is the commitment to awaken — to step into our doubts and predicaments and hear the roaring of life at the still point of a turning universe. Through weekly practice of meditation, we discover a clarity of mind attentive and accountable to each moment of life's flow, and touch the mystery of our original face. This group is open to anyone interested, no experience necessary, and instructions will be provided. Tuesdays, 4:30-6:00 p.m., in the Ames Chapel. Questions? Contact kp@unityunitarian.org.

Gender + Faith Retreat

Saturday, March 19

We're inviting people of all genders to come to our very first Gender + Faith retreat Saturday, March 19, for conversation, growth, and community-building around our gender and faith identities. We'll explore our gender journeys, share stories about the intersection of gender and faith in our lives, and consider how our spiritual practices and commitment to our End Statements might help us interrupt marginalization based on gender that happens among us in our church community. We've extended the deadline for participant interest forms to Friday, March 4. Details and interest form are online at unityunitarian.org/gender-faith-retreat.html.



Qigong and Tai Ji

*Be like a tree in pursuit of your cause
Stand firm, grip hard
thrust upward
bend to the winds of heaven
and learn tranquility*

Tuesday, March 22 • Noon-1:00 p.m.

Foot Room

Register: <https://bit.ly/taiji322>

Wood is one of the five moving forces from the Tao. It symbolizes spring and new beginnings. We will wake up, stretch, sway and shake to lift our spirits and greet the change.

The class includes Tai Ji, Qigong, meditation, and poetry. The practice is a safe and gentle form of exercise for people of all ages. No experience necessary. Wear comfortable shoes and loose clothing if possible. A free will offering will be taken for teacher Lisa Schlingerman. Masks, vaccination and sign-up required.



Lectio Divina

Sunday, March 27 • 4:30 p.m. • Online

Register: <https://bit.ly/LectioSun>

Following a centuries-old Benedictine spiritual practice of contemplative reading, meet online to share in Lectio Divina. In this invitation to receive the wisdom and gifts of poetry, each session engages the group in hearing a particular poem read aloud, listening for "what is found there." Led by Lisa Wersal, this practice is a rich way to receive the gifts of poetry in a small group setting. Drop-in attendance is welcome. Information about Wednesday's Lectio practice is available on page 8.

Fellowship Groups

For more conversation about getting connected, contact Laura Park at laura@unityunitarian.org.

Afterthoughts offers time immediately following the 9:00 service to discuss the service.

Caregivers Group meets on the third Thursday of the month.

Evergreen Quilters: This quilting group meets the second Tuesday of the month, 7:00-9:00 p.m. and fourth Saturday of the month.

Families Living with Mental Health Challenges meets the first Saturday of each month, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

Five Animal Kung Fu meets Saturdays, 9:30-11:00 a.m.

Living With Grief Group meets on the third Tuesday of the month.

Men's Breakfast Group meets monthly on the first Saturday for breakfast from 8:30-10:00 a.m.

Men's Coffee Group meets every other Wednesday, March 9 and 23, at 10:00 a.m. for light-hearted conversation.

Men's Conversation Group meets Mondays, March 7 and 21, from 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Men's Retirement Circle: Monday, March 14 and 28, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

New Look at the Bible meets the second Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m.

Recovery from White Conditioning meets Wednesdays, 6:00-7:00 p.m.

Textile Arts Group meets online the first and third Wednesday of each month from 7:00-8:30 p.m. Bring your knitting, embroidery, etc.

Unity Book Club meets the second Tuesday of the month, 7:00-8:30 p.m. March 8 discussion: TBA

Women In Retirement meets the second and fourth Thursday of the month, 1:00-3:00 p.m.



Guilty as Sin

Drew Danielson, Coordinator of Youth and Campus Ministries

Say what you will about Catholics or Lutherans and Sunday school, they got the lessons about sin down pat. I'm secure in calling myself a converted Unitarian Universalist, but in terms of sin I'm not inclined to take any chances by refuting what my Sunday school teachers hammered home —

basically that having even one unforgiven sin on your ledger at your time of death would be bad — eternal damnation bad.

This belief during my adolescence led to me being nervous many evenings as I hoped not to die before I could say my nightly prayers and ask for absolution. It didn't get easier moving into my teens, as whole new categories of sin became possible and life became more complicated. I had the potential to be a sinning machine!

My seventh grade catechism minister was actually a very big help when he told us something I hold to be pretty much undeniable truth to this day: "Sin is selfishness. If it's a selfish act, it's sin." Pastor Mike wasn't trying to be super hardline fire and brimstone when he told us this, he was trying to preach a Jesus first, Others next, Yourself last recipe for salvation. He told us that loving others was always good, loving ourselves, well that's where you had to be careful.

When I sit with the Tower Club youth and they talk about their lives, what they are getting worked up about or anxious over, there is often a tension expressed about having to balance time and efforts between what they want for others and need to do for themselves. I struggled with how to put that because I know it gets sensitive — do we feel it's more important to develop our own potential and to ensure our own bright futures, or to devote ourselves to the welfare of others? Surely they don't need to be mutually exclusive, but still there is only so much time to do everything.

"I would like to donate my time for social justice but between sports and theater and studying for the ACT I have no time," said more than one Unity Church high school junior over the years. As they said that I thought of them standing before Saint Peter at the pearly gate, telling him that, and seeing them sent straight to hell. I suppose it's a good thing that when I've shared that scenario with them, a scene I had hammered into my head when I was their age, that they can laugh it off.

Should they though? Is sin negotiable? Do we get to ponder whether something is sin or whether there is any cost for sinning? That doesn't feel practical, or safe for the world. But I also know what happens when we have let others have the power to say what is and isn't sin and to enforce those beliefs. Honestly I yearn for it to be black and white. I'd probably volunteer to sit on a council to figure it out and pass judgement. I'd be lenient and compassionate, but tough as nails. I'd refer to my seventh grade minister's definition often.

And I do know what Saint Peter is probably going to say to me.

A Fairy Good Friend

Unity Church Youth Musical

March 10, 11, 12

Details on page 9

Friendships, and stereotypes about them, are examined as a forest fairy and a dragon become friends. Themes include following one's dreams, looking outside of the box, and forgiveness.



March Religious Education Calendar

New Family Orientation: Wednesday, March 2, 7:15 p.m., email michelle@unityunitarian.org for Zoom invitation

Regular Religious Education classes: Sunday, March 6, 13, 20, 17



Music Notes

Ahmed Anzaldúa, Director of Music Ministries

There is a lot to unpack in the concept of sin, the worship theme for the month of March.

Instead of trying to do that I'd instead like to use this space to offer a reflection on how I came to embrace my favorite sin: music.

I grew up in a Muslim family in Mexico. We lived in the middle of Chihuahua, the largest state in Mexico, with a population of about four million. As far as we knew, the four members of my family were the only Muslims out of those four million people. To see another Muslim, enter a mosque, or have access to halal meat we had to drive about seven hours... the isolation made it difficult to follow all the rules you're supposed to follow as a practicing Muslim.

Whether music is or is not a sin is heavily debated in Islam. A simple online search for "is music haram?" will bring up tens of thousands of results, page after page of the sayings of the Prophet and verses of the Quran that support or contradict the idea of music being permissible for Muslims (all well known to me by now). Music and the arts are in a strange gray area in Islam. There is widespread agreement among scholars that most music is indeed a sin, but Islamic culture is also incredibly rich in musical expression of all forms and across cultures.

Growing up, there were all sorts of loopholes to justify some types of music over others, all incomprehensible to me: I was allowed to have piano lessons because the piano is technically a percussion instrument, and there are hadith that permit the playing of the drum and tambourine, but I was not allowed to play when there was dancing or singing onstage. I

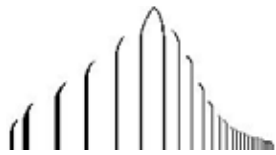
was allowed to sing in a choir, but definitely not on Christmas, and singing a solo was forbidden, only ensemble singing, and never in a mixed choir... but I had to keep practicing my vocal technique, because I needed to be a good singer to recite the Quran beautifully, but if I called it "singing" it was a sin, it was actually recitation (though ten-year-old Ahmed didn't really hear a difference). My dad's Beatles and Cat Stevens records were always playing in the house and my mom loved to sing loudly along to the Mexican radio, but the music I wanted to listen to as a preteen oddly always seemed to fall in the category of "sinful." It was confusing and convoluted; technically, the branch of Islam that was practiced in my house was a type of Islam that rejected music as sinful, but it was also clear that my parents' heart wasn't really in it when it came to enforcing that rule.

So, I rebelled. I bought lots of blank cassette tapes and recorded songs off the radio when at friends' houses, and later lots of CDs, all hidden away in the back corner of my closet. I would play them whenever my parents weren't around, and I'd often sneak out to the garage and listen to my music in the family car. This was definitely the sort of music that is unequivocally haram: hip-hop, metal, electronic dance music, music about partying or drinking, or promoting "lascivious behavior." I was caught a few times, got punished and sometimes also got the belt (corporal punishment was still a thing in my household in the 1990s). The weekends when I stayed overnight at my grandparents' house were especially great: they had a piano and a guitar, and their neighbors were my cousins and uncles who had no issues with listening to music. They also had cable and lots of hours were spent watching MTV and the Mexican

music video television channels. I played in rock bands and in a mariachi band, always lying about where exactly I was going or what I was actually doing.

Oddly enough, I never felt guilty about sneaking around to engage in music. I had a similar journey with my other favorite sin: tacos. Around that time I started eating pork in secret all the time (for a Muslim pork is unequivocally sinful). However, unlike my sneaky musical experiences, every delicious taco al pastor I ate filled me with guilt and regret afterward for lying to my parents. Music, on the other hand, never felt wrong, and the prohibition on music was always clearly unnatural and futile; as the conductor Robert Shaw used to say: "...music is not a luxury, it is a necessity; not simply because it is therapeutic, nor because it is the universal language, but because it is the persistent focus of (humanity's) intelligence, aspiration and good will."

As an adult, well after I had abandoned the practice of Islam, I found in Sufism a perspective that had been missing from my upbringing in a fundamentalist Shia Islamic tradition. Many Sufis argue that all human music is an echo of the one true music, the Voice of God, which the Prophet Moses heard at Sinai. Making music is not only permissible, but necessary. It is how we remind ourselves of God's voice and how we maintain our connection to the divine. According to Sufi mystic poets like Jami and Rumi, we are musical instruments. Our life is music, breathed into us by God just like we breathe music into an oboe or a clarinet. We are God's reeds.



UNITY CHURCH-UNITARIAN

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MATERIAL**

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Saturday, March 19
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