

Arthur Foote Music Sunday  
*Considering Matthew Shepard*



Unity Church-Unitarian

May 3, 2026

9:00 and 11:15 AM

[LIVESTREAM](#) AT 9:00

FROM AHMED ANZALDÚA, DIRECTOR OF MUSIC MINISTRIES

Since we started the church year in September, the entire Music Ministry has been working on a monumental work that, in my opinion, couldn't be more relevant to our present moment: *Considering Matthew Shepard* by Craig Hella Johnson. Throughout the year, the various choirs have been singing excerpts from the work in different worship services, and we now have the opportunity to place these excerpts in the context of the overarching narrative of this work.

*Considering Matthew Shepard* is a large-scale choral work created by Craig Hella Johnson and librettist Michael Dennis Browne, who passed away very recently and who himself had connections to Unity Church. Both artists have deep roots in Minnesota, and the piece itself was born out of a long creative partnership grounded in shared values of community, empathy, and social responsibility. The work responds to the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, a young gay man in Wyoming whose death became a catalyst for national conversations about hate crimes and LGBTQ+ dignity. Rather than telling the story as a linear narrative, the piece invites us into a deeper act of contemplation. It draws on poetry, journal entries, interviews, scripture, and hymnody to ask not only what happened, but how we are called to respond.

One of the most powerful aspects of this work is its profound sense of humanity. The libretto gives voice to grief, anger, tenderness, and the search for meaning, while the music holds those emotions with extraordinary care. *Considering Matthew Shepard* does not offer easy answers or tidy resolutions. Instead, it creates space for lament, for honest confrontation with violence and hatred, and for the slow and necessary work of healing and transformation. It is music that feels especially at home at Unity Church, where worship can hold joy and sorrow side by side.

As we approach this performance, we invite you to be present with this work in its fullness. This is not only a concert, but an act of communal reflection. It asks us to listen deeply, to bear witness, and to consider how we respond to one another in a world still marked by violence and division. In gathering together for this performance, we affirm the role of music as a space where beauty and truth can meet, and where our shared commitment to love, justice, and the inherent worth and dignity of every person can be renewed.

The offering will support the vibrant and diverse music ministry of Unity Church, nourishing our outstanding choral singing programs and creating musical connections within, among, and beyond our community. Make a donation online using the code, at [bit.ly/sundayoffering](https://bit.ly/sundayoffering) or place donations in the baskets located on the table outside the back of the Sanctuary. Donations will not be collected during the service.



The flowers in the Main Lobby are given with gratitude for the music that so graciously honors Arthur Foote.  
From Susan, Ben, Liam, and Mateo Foote

ARTHUR FOOTE MUSIC SUNDAY  
May 3, 2026

PROLOGUE

All.  
*Yoodle-oooh, yoodle-oooh-hoo, so sings a lone cowboy,  
Who with the wild roses wants you to be free.*

CATTLE, HORSES, SKY AND GRASS

Cattle, horses, sky and grass  
These are the things that sway and pass  
Before our eyes and through our dreams  
Through shiny, sparkly, golden gleams  
Within our psyche that find and know  
The value of this special glow  
That only gleams for those who bleed  
Their soul and heart and utter need  
Into the mighty, throbbing Earth  
From which springs life and death and birth.  
I'm alive! I'm alive, I'm alive, golden. I'm alive, I'm alive, I'm alive  
These cattle, horses, grass, and sky  
Dance and dance and never die  
They circle through the realms of air  
And ground and empty spaces where  
A human being can join the song  
Can circle, too, and not go wrong  
Amidst the natural, pulsing forces  
Of sky and grass and cows and horses.  
I'm alive, I'm alive, I'm alive  
This chant of life cannot be heard  
It must be felt, there is no word  
To sing that could express the true  
Significance of how we wind  
Through all these hoops of Earth and mind  
Through horses, cattle, sky and grass  
And all these things that sway and pass.

ORDINARY BOY

Let's talk about Matt –  
Ordinary Boy, ordinary boy, ordinary boy  
Born in December in Casper, Wyoming  
Ordinary boy  
to a father, Dennis  
and a mother, Judy  
Ordinary boy, ordinary boy  
Then came a younger brother, Logan  
Ordinary boy  
His name was Matthew Wayne Shepard.  
And one day his name came to be known around the world.  
But as his mother said:

**Judy Shepard:** *You knew him as Matthew. To us he was Matt.*

He went camping, he went fishing, even hunting for a moose He read plays and he read stories and especially Dr. Seuss.  
He wrote poems with illustrations for the neighbors on the street And he left them in each mailbox till he learned it was illegal. He made friends and he wore braces and his frame was rather small He sang songs his father taught him...

*Frere Jacques  
Row Row Row Your Boat  
Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*

**Judy:** *He was my son, my first-born, and more. He was my friend, my confidant my constant reminder of how good life can be – and .... how hurtful.*

How good life can be, how good life can be

**Judy:** *Matt's laugh, his wonderful hugs, his stories*

*Matt writes about himself in a notebook:*

*I am funny, sometimes forgetful and messy and lazy. I am not a lazy person though. I am giving and understanding. And formal and polite. I am sensitive. I am honest. I am sincere. And I am not a pest.*

*I am not a pest, I am not a pest.*

*I am my own person. I am warm.*

*I want my life to be happy and I want to be clearer about things. I want to feel good.*

*I love Wyoming . . .*

*I love Wyoming very much . . .*

*I love theatre*

*I love good friends*

*I love succeeding*

*I love pasta*

*I love jogging*

*I love walking and feeling good*

*I love Europe and driving and music and helping and smiling and Charlie and Jeopardy I love movies and eating and positive people and pasta and driving and walking and jogging and kissing and learning and airports and music and smiling and hugging and being myself I love theatre! I love theatre!*

*And I love to be on stage!*

Such an ordinary boy living ordinary days

In an ordinary life so worth living

He felt ordinary yearning and ordinary fears

With an ordinary hope for belonging

He felt ordinary yearning and ordinary fears with an ordinary hope for belonging (Born to live this ordinary life)

Just an ordinary boy living ordinary days with extraordinary kindness extraordinary laughter, extraordinary shining, extraordinary light and joy.

Joy and light.

I love, I love, I love . . .

Ordinary boy, ordinary boy

### **WE TELL EACH OTHER STORIES**

We tell each other stories so that we will remember

Try and find the meaning in the living of our days

Always telling stories, wanting to remember

Where and whom we came from

Who we are

Sometimes there's a story that's painful to remember

One that breaks the heart of us all

Still we tell the story

We're listening and confessing

What we have forgotten

In the story of us all

We tell each other stories so that we will remember

Trying to find the meaning . . .

I am open to hear this story about a boy, an ordinary boy

Who never had expected his life would be this story,

(could be any boy)

I am open to hear a story

Open, listen,

All.

**PASSION  
RECITATION**

Laramie, southeastern Wyoming, between the Snowy Range and the Laramie Range. Tuesday, October 6, 1998. Tuesday night. Matthew attended a meeting of the University of Wyoming's Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Association, then joined others for coffee at the College Inn. Around 10:30, he went to the Fireside Bar, where he later met Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson. Near midnight, they drove him to a remote area, tied him to a buck and rail fence, beat him horribly and left him to die in the cold of night.

**THE FENCE (THAT NIGHT)**

Most noble evergreen with your roots in the sun:  
you shine in the cloudless sky of a sphere no earthly eminence can grasp, You blush like the dawn,  
you burn like a flame of the sun.  
I held him all night long  
He was heavy as a broken heart  
Tears fell from his unblinking eyes  
He was dead weight yet he kept breathing  
He was heavy as a broken heart  
His own heart wouldn't stop beating  
The cold wind wouldn't stop blowing  
His face streaked with moonlight and blood  
I tightened my grip and held on  
The cold wind wouldn't stop blowing  
We were out on the prairie alone  
I tightened my grip and held on  
I saw what was done to this child  
We were out on the prairie alone  
Their truck was the last thing he saw  
I saw what was done to this child  
I cradled him just like a mother  
*Most noble evergreen, most noble evergreen,  
Your roots in the sun . . .*  
Their truck was the last thing he saw  
Tears fell from his unblinking eyes  
I cradled him just like a mother  
I held him all night long  
*Most noble evergreen . . .*

**RECITATION**

The next morning, Matthew was found by a cyclist, a fellow student, who at first thought he was a scarecrow. After several days in a coma and on life support, Matthew Shepard died on Monday, October 12, at 12:53 a.m. At the funeral, which took place on Friday, October 16, at St Mark's Episcopal Church in Casper, Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church protested outside.

**A PROTESTOR**

*God Hates Fags, Matt in Hell*  
— Signs held by anti-gay protestors at Matthew Shephard's funeral and the trials of his murderers  
*kreuzige, kreuzige! (translation: crucify, crucify)*

A boy who takes a boy to bed?  
Where I come from that's not polite  
He asked for it, you got that right  
The fires of Hell burn hot and red  
The only good fag is a fag that's dead  
A man and a woman, the Good Lord said

As sure as Eve took that first bite  
The fires of Hell burn hot and red

*kreuzige, kreuzige!*

Beneath the Hunter's Moon he bled  
That must have been a pretty sight  
The fires of Hell burn hot and red

C'mon, kids, it's time for bed  
Say your prayers, kiss Dad good night  
A boy who takes a boy to bed?  
The fires of Hell burn hot and red

*crucify, crucify . . . the light  
crucify the light . . .*

### RECITATION

National media began to broadcast the story. As the news began to spread, many people across the country gathered together in candlelight vigils, moved to (silently) speak for life over death, love over hate, light over darkness.

### FIRE OF THE ANCIENT HEART

**Cantor:**

*“What have you done? Hark, thy brother's blood  
Cries to me from the ground.”*

**Choir:**

Called by this candle  
Led to the flame  
Called to remember  
Enter the flame

**Cantor:**

*all our flames now  
swaying and free  
all our hearts now  
moving as one  
every living spirit  
turned toward peace  
all our tender  
hopes awake*

**Choir:**

Called by this candle  
Led to the flame  
Called to remember  
Enter the flame

**Fire: howl**

**Fire: broken**

**Fire: burst**

**Fire: rage**

**Fire: swell**

**Fire: shatter**

**Fire: wail**

**Fire**

We all betray the ancient heart  
Ev'ry one of us, all of us  
His heart, my heart, your heart, one heart  
("In each moment the fire rages, it will burn away a hundred veils.")  
Burning Breaking Grasping Raging

how do we keep these  
flames in our hands?  
how do we guard these  
fears in our hearts?  
how long to hold these  
griefs in our songs?  
remembering anger  
weave it with hope  
remembering exile  
braid it with praise  
longing past horror  
longing past dread  
dreaming of healing  
past all of our pain

**Fire: living in me**  
**Fire: purify**  
**Fire: now hold me**  
**Fire: seize my heart**

*(enter the flame, enter the flame  
shatter my heart, shatter my heart  
called to enter, burn a hundred veils)*

Called by this flame  
Fire of my heart:  
Break down all walls  
Open all doors  
Only this Love

"Eyes of flesh, eyes of fire" ~  
Lumina, lumina, lumina

*Open us,  
All!  
(In each moment the fire rages, it will burn away a hundred veils.)*

### **RECITATION**

Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson were arrested shortly after the attack and charged with murder, kidnapping, and aggravated robbery. The first of two trials began on October 26, 1999; both were convicted of the murder and sentenced to two consecutive life sentences.

### **WE ARE ALL SONS**

Stray birds of summer come to my window to sing and fly away.  
And yellow leaves of autumn which have no songs flutter and fall there with a sigh. Once we dreamt that we were strangers.  
We wake up to find that we are dear to each other.  
we are all sons of fathers and mothers  
we are all sons  
we are all rivers  
the roar of waters, we are all sons

## I AM LIKE YOU

I am like you

Aaron

and Russell

When I think of you (and honestly I don't like to think about you) but sometimes I do, I am so horrified, and just so angry and confused (and scared) that you could do things to another boy – they were so cruel and so undeserved, so dark and hard and full of (I don't know) late one night I had a glimpse of something I recognized, just a tiny glimpse – I don't even like to say this out loud, it isn't even all that true – but I wondered for a moment, am I like you? (in any way) (I pray the answer is no) Am I like you? I bet you once had hopes and dreams, too. Some things we love get lost along the way, That's just like me – get lost along the way I am like you, I get confused and I'm afraid and I've been reckless, I've been restless, bored, unthinking, listless, intoxicated, I've come unhinged, and made mistakes and hurt people very much. Sometimes I feel (in springtime, in early afternoon) the sunshine warm on my face; you feel this too (don't you?), the sunshine warm on your face. I am like you. (this troubles me). I am like you (just needed to say this). Some things we love get lost along the way.

we are all sons of fathers and mothers  
we are all sons  
sometimes no home for us here on the earth  
no place to lay our heads  
we are all sons of fathers and mothers  
if you could know for one moment  
how it is to live in our bodies  
within the world  
if you could know  
you ask too much of us  
you ask too little

## THE INNOCENCE

When I think of all the times the world was ours for dreaming,  
When I think of all the times the earth seemed like our home –  
Every heart alive with its own longing,  
Every future we could ever hope to hold.

All the times our laughter rang in summer,  
All the times the rivers sang our tune –  
Was there already sadness in the sunlight?  
Some stormy story waiting to be told?

*Where O where has the innocence gone?  
Where O where has it gone?  
Rains rolling down wash away my memory  
Where O where has it gone?*

When I think of all the joys, the wonders we remember  
All the treasures we believed we'd never ever lose.  
Too many days gone by without their meaning,  
Too many darkened hours without their peace.

*Where O where has the innocence gone?  
Where O where has it gone?  
Vows we once swore, now it's just this letting go,  
Where O where has it gone?*

## RECITATION

Matthew's father made his statement to the court on November 5, 1999.

## STARS

*By the end of the beating, his body was just trying to survive. You left him out there by himself, but he wasn't alone. There were his lifelong friends with him – friends that he had grown up with. You're probably wondering who these friends were. First, he had the beautiful night sky with the same stars and moon that we used to look at through a telescope. Then, he had the daylight and the sun to shine on him one more time – one more cool, wonderful autumn day in Wyoming. His last day alive in Wyoming. His last day alive in the state that he always proudly called home. And through it all he was breathing in for the last time the smell of Wyoming sagebrush and the scent of pine trees from the snowy range. He heard the wind – the ever-present Wyoming wind – for the last time. He had one more friend with him. One he grew to know through his time in Sunday school and as an acolyte at St. Mark's in Casper as well as through his visits to St. Matthew's in Laramie.*

*I feel better knowing he wasn't alone.*

Stars

scattered  
the

across

sky

blinking in

dismay

unable

to help

being

light

years

away

## RECITATION

Matthew was left tied to the fence for almost eighteen hours.

## IN NEED OF BREATH

**Matt:**

My heart

Is an unset jewel

Upon the tender night

Yearning for its dear old friend

The Moon.

When the Nameless One debuts again

Ten thousand facets of my being unfurl wings

And reveal such a radiance inside

I enter a realm divine –

I too begin to sweetly cast light,

Like a lamp,

I cast light

Through the streets of this

World.

My heart is an unset jewel

Upon existence

Waiting for the Friend's touch.

Tonight

Tonight  
My heart is an unset ruby  
Offered bowed and weeping to the Sky.  
I am dying in these cold hours  
For the resplendent glance of God.

My heart  
Is an unset jewel  
Upon the tender night  
My heart is an unset ruby  
Offered bowed and weeping to the Sky.

### RECITATION

Sheriff's Deputy, Reggie Fluty, the first to report to the scene, told Judy Shepard that as she ran to the fence she saw a large doe lying near Matt, as if the deer had been keeping him company all through the night.

### DEER SONG

**Deer:** *A mist is over the mountain,  
The stars in their meadows upon the air,  
Your people are waiting below them,  
And you know there's a gathering there.  
All night I lay there beside you,  
I cradled your pain in my care,  
We move through creation together,  
And we know there's a welcoming there.*

Welcome, welcome, sounds the song,  
Calling, calling clear;  
Always with us, evergreen heart,  
Where can we be but there?

**Matt:** *I'll find all the love I have longed for,  
The home that's been calling my heart so long  
So soon I'll be cleansed in those waters,  
My fevers forever be gone;  
Where else on earth but these waters?  
No more, no more to be torn;  
My own ones, my dearest, are waiting—  
And I'll weep to be where I belong.*

Welcome, welcome, sounds the song,  
Calling, calling clear;  
Always with me, evergreen heart,  
Where can we be but there?

### PILGRIMAGE

*The land was sold and a new fence now stands about fifty yards away. People still come to pay their respects.*  
— Jim Osborn, friend of Matthew Shepard

I walk to the fence with beauty before me  
*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want*  
I walk to the fence with beauty behind me  
*Yit'gadal v'yit'kadash (may his great name grow)*  
I walk to the fence with beauty above me  
*Om Mani Padme Ham (Om! the jewel in the lotus, hum!)*

I walk to the fence with beauty below me  
*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit*  
I reach the fence surrounded by beauty  
*wail of wind, cry of hawk*  
I leave the fence surrounded by beauty  
*sigh of sagebrush, hush of stone*  
(Beauty above me, beauty below me  
By beauty surrounded)  
Still, still, still, I wonder....  
*wail of wind, cry of hawk*  
Still, still, still, I wonder....  
*wail of wind, cry of hawk*  
Still still still

## **EPILOGUE**

### **MEET ME HERE**

Meet me here  
Won't you meet me here  
Where the old fence ends and the horizon begins  
There's a balm in the silence  
Like an understanding air  
Where the old fence ends and the horizon begins  
We've been walking through the darkness  
On this long, hard climb  
Carried ancestral sorrow  
For too long a time  
Will you lay down your burden  
Lay it down, come with me  
It will never be forgotten  
Held in love, so tenderly

Meet me here  
Won't you meet me here  
Where the old fence ends and the horizon begins There's a joy in the singing  
Like an understanding air  
Where the old fence ends and the horizon begins  
Then we'll come to the mountain  
We'll go bounding to see  
That great circle of dancing  
And we'll dance endlessly  
And we'll dance with all the children  
Who've been lost along the way  
We will welcome each other  
Coming home, this glorious day

We are home in the mountain  
And we'll gently understand  
That we've been friends forever  
That we've never been alone  
We'll sing on through any darkness  
And our Song will be our sight  
We can learn to offer praise again  
Coming home to the light . . .

## ALL OF US

What could be the song?  
Where begin again?  
Who could meet us there? Where might we begin?  
From the shadows climb,  
Rise to sing again;  
Where could be the joy?  
How do we begin?  
Never our despair,  
Never the least of us,  
Never turn away,  
Never hide your face;  
Ordinary boy,  
Only all of us,  
Free us from our fear,  
Only all of us.  
What could be the song?  
Where begin again?  
Who could meet us there? Where might we begin?  
From the shadows climb,  
Rise to sing again;  
Where could be the joy?  
How do we begin?  
Never our despair,  
Never the least of us,  
Never turn away,  
Never hide your face;  
Ordinary boy,  
Only all of us,  
Free us from our fear.  
Only in the Love,  
Love that lifts us up,  
Clear from out the heart  
From the mountain's side,  
Come creation come,  
Strong as any stream;  
How can we let go? How can we forgive? How can we be dream?  
Out of heaven, rain,  
Rain to wash us free;  
Rivers flowing on,  
Ever to the sea;  
Bind up every wound,  
Every cause to grieve;  
Always to forgive,  
Only to believe.

[Chorale:]

*Most noble Light, Creation's face,  
How should we live but joined in you,  
Remain within your saving grace  
Through all we say and do  
And know we are the Love that moves  
The sun and all the stars?  
O Love that dwells, O Love that burns In every human heart.*

(Only in the Love, Love that lifts us up!)

*This evergreen, this heart, this soul,  
Now moves us to remake our world,  
Reminds us how we are to be  
Your people born to dream;  
How old this joy, how strong this call,  
To sing your radiant care  
With every voice, in cloudless hope  
Of our belonging here.*

Only in the Love . . .

Only all of us . . .

(Heaven: Wash me . . .)

All of us, only all of us.

What could be the song?

Where do we begin?

Only in the Love, Love that lifts us up. All of Us

All.

### **CATTLE, HORSES, SKY and GRASS (Reprise)**

This chant of life cannot be heard  
It must be felt, there is no word  
To sing that could express the true  
Significance of how we wind  
Through all these hoops of Earth and mind  
Through horses, cattle, sky and grass  
And all these things that sway and pass.

*Yoodle-oooh, yoodle-oooh-hoo, so sings a lone cowboy,  
Who with the wild roses wants you to be free.*

## FOOTE SUNDAY MUSICIANS

Unity Choir is a large choral ensemble (typically between 60 and 80 voices) and is the strong component on which Unity's choral program is built; a vital and energetic presence in our community. Its members share various levels of musical experience and a wide variety of activities and interests, all of which are brought together by their love of singing, music, and community.

Unity Singers is Unity's auditioned, chamber choral ensemble. Each singer's involvement is built on a passion for singing and for ministry through music. This ensemble has an outstanding trajectory of representing Unitarian Universalist music locally and abroad through many commissions and premieres of music by world renowned composers, professionally produced recording projects, and collaborations with other ensembles and community organizations.

Unity's Women's Ensemble meets for only one half-hour each Sunday morning and to this short rehearsal time the members bring tremendous creative energy, commitment, and joy! While this group emerged and continues to function as a space that supports and empowers women, all soprano and alto singers are encouraged to apply for Unity's Women's Ensemble, including transfeminine, transmasculine, and nonbinary as well as cis male sopranos and altos.

Unity Children's Choir is a vibrant group of singers comprised of children from grades one through five. The choir meets from 10:15-10:55 a.m., each Sunday in the Choir Room at Unity Church. Children's choir rehearsal activities are focused on hands-on music making. No prior experience is required to join the choir. Priscilla Morton, volunteer pianist

### Instruments:

Piano: Jared Mikach

Percussion: Eri Isomura

Auxiliary percussion: Tara Messina

Violin: Elise Parker

Viola: Anne Ainomae

Cello: Jane O'Hara

String Bass: Callum Schultz

Clarinet: Alan Kolderie

Guitar: Alvaro Henrique

Unity Church resides on the homelands of the Dakota and Ojibwe Nations. We honor with gratitude the people who have stewarded the land throughout the generations and their ongoing contributions to this region. We acknowledge the ongoing injustices that we have committed against the Dakota and Ojibwe Nations, and we wish to interrupt this legacy, beginning with acts of healing and honest storytelling about this place.

#### Unity Church Ends Statements

We the people of Unity Church-Unitarian, grounded in a joyous vision of beloved community, within, among, and beyond ourselves,

- understand the interconnected roots of oppression and yoke ourselves to the demands, sacrifices, and hard work of antiracism, multiculturalism, and climate and economic justice;
- cultivate a multigenerational community of joy, care, and belonging, and evangelize love to meet the deep and abiding hunger in all of us;
- practice lifelong faith formation, grounded in Unitarian Universalist theology, that breaks us open and allows us to be transformed.

To access the Sanctuary's assistive listening system, please switch your hearing aid to "T" or request headphones or assistance from an usher. Large print orders of service are also available by request to an usher.

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