

OPEN PAGE GUIDED WRITING SESSIONS THEMES AND TOPICS

OPEN PAGE: reflecting with pens in hand

Led by Literary Minister Rev. Karen Hering, these guided writing sessions are invitations to the creative spirit, opportunities to correspond with “the still, small voice within.” No writing experience needed. **NOTE:** If you don’t see the topic you want in the list below, please ask. New topics are always being developed and can be requested.

Belonging

“The bird belongs to the sky, even though it cannot sleep there; the egg belongs to the nest even though it will not stay there.” To whom and to what do you belong? Join us for an exploration of the many forms and faces of belonging and the many ways we find it in our lives.

Blessing

A blessing, according to John O’Donohue, “is a circle of light drawn around a person to protect, heal, and strengthen. . . . A blessing awakens future wholeness.” Join in a session of writing and reflection exploring the healing and wholeness of blessing.

Brokenness

“There is a crack in everything,” observed Leonard Cohen. *“That’s how the light gets in.”* We’ll explore the places where we experience the world or ourselves as broken, and consider how we can find our way to wholeness. How is brokenness healed? And how does it sometimes open our lives and our world to the truth and the light we are seeking?

The Caregivers’ Challenge: A Shifting Balance

As caregivers of loved ones in ill health, we often face the challenge of finding and keeping our balance while responding to another’s often shifting needs. This guided writing session specifically for caregivers offers a chance to listen to one’s own voice and needs while caring for another.

Coming Out Stories

“Whatever coaxes us out of hiding,” says the writer Sark, “to write, record, and express is a revolutionary act (that) says our lives count.” In this guided writing session, you are invited to bring your own story out of hiding. We’ll explore on our own pages the personal identities, truths and stories that we often keep hidden.

Covenant

We “become human beings by making commitments, by making promises,” said James Luther Adams. Quoting fellow theologian Martin Buber, he called humans the “promise-making, promise-keeping, promise-breaking, promise-renewing creature.” What does our capacity for promise-making and covenant mean and how does it shape our human identity, our communities of faith and our role in creating new realities in the world?

Courage

"It is in the small things we see it," writes Anne Sexton of courage. "The child's first step, as awesome as an earthquake. The first time you rode a bike. . . ." But its reputation also rises from larger evidence of daring and defiance. This guided writing session explores the nature and sources of courage and its movement large and small within our lives.

Darkness and Light

"What does light talk about?" Thomas Aquinas once reported asking a plant, to which the plant replied, "I am not sure, but it makes me grow." This session, especially suitable for solstice and equinox times, explores the dynamic balance between darkness and light in nature and time, the necessity of both and the danger of framing them as a dualism.

Faith

In the early Buddhist, Jewish and Christian texts, faith is not a noun but a verb. It is a way that we live, a leap that we take. In the Pali language of the original Buddhist texts, it meant literally "to place the heart upon." This writing session offers an exploration of faith as something we do. How and where do we offer our hearts? And what does it mean when we do?

Freedom

"Freedom is not something that anybody can be given," said James Baldwin. "Freedom is something that people take and people are as free as they want to be." How do we find and claim the freedom we each want and need? And what responsibilities accompany our freedom? How does true freedom ironically bind us to others?

Hope

"Hope is not merely an emotion that comes and goes. It is a virtue, resulting from a conscious, deliberate choice and long practice," says writer Mary McDermott Shideler. Where do we find hope in the world today, and how might we choose it and practice it? This writing session explores the nature of hope and how we can cultivate it.

Incarnation

How do the old stories of incarnation and our own contemporary experience together illuminate our understanding of this embodied life – with all its beauty and its brokenness and blessings? This session offers a thoughtful reflection on the holiness nested within our world.

Justice

Pascal once observed that justice is too subtle a point to be touched by our blunt tools. Perhaps this is why its meaning has so often been carried by symbols and stories passed down through the ages. This session explores the swinging scales of justice and other symbols and stories.

Longing

We are all, as Kahlil Gibran noted, the “sons and daughters of life longing for itself.” But our consumer culture often conflates longing and desire, as if longing could be satisfied by purchases, progress or possessions. What is the nature of longing and how do we respond to it? What does our longing point us toward? And what would happen if we let ourselves belong to our deepest longing?

Love

“Love is our true destiny,” said Thomas Merton. “We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone – we find it with one another.” We’ll move well beyond a greeting card understanding to consider love’s many faces, its many gifts and its many demands.

Nature: Faith in a Seed

“Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed,” Thoreau confessed. “Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.” This writing session reflects on how nature seeds and feeds our faith. Bring pen and paper – and a few seeds for sharing.

Paradise

Paradise has often been imagined as a garden laden with fruit, absent of toil and suffering and shining in perfect possibilities, each one realized. What can we learn about the world we live in today, by exploring the myths of paradise found somewhere else?

Peace

“Peace is people talking together with a heart in between them.” So says a wise eight-year-old, reminding us that peace is less about the absence of conflict than our ability to respond to one another with hearts engaged and held open in conversation and relationship. This session explores the inner and outer dimensions of peace and how one affects the other.

Pilgrims and Pilgrimage

“The geographical pilgrimage is the symbolic acting out of an inner journey,” said Thomas Merton. This guided writing session explores the inner and outer aspects of pilgrimage as well as the new navigational skills often discovered on a pilgrimage.

Prayer

“There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground,” the poet Rumi eloquently reminded us long ago. This session explores the many prayerful possibilities in our own daily lives, including the prayer of deep listening.

Redemption

The poet William Stafford once said of his poems, “I have woven a parachute of everything broken.” This session explores the many different parachutes that save us, as we reflect on the topic of redemption.

Sabbath

A day of rest can be hard to find in our world of 24/7 opportunities. But an empty day, like an empty page, carries its own possibilities. “All creation springs from emptiness,” says writer Wayne Muller. This session explores the creative possibilities of rest and emptiness in a reflection on the topic of Sabbath.

Sacrifice

“The law of every living thing is growth,” writes Susan Griffin, “through love, through willing sacrifice, or both.” This writing session asks what sacrifices are required of us today. And how might we respond?

Sin

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, 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?

Surrender

“Adoration, as it more deeply possesses us, inevitably leads on to self-offering,” wrote Evelyn Underhill. To what sacred truth and presence do you offer yourself? What is the meaning of surrender in our spiritual journeys? What does it ask – and not ask – of us today?

Transformation

As winter slowly gives way to spring, Wendell Berry pays homage to the transformation occurring in the natural world when he writes: “*bud opening to flower / opening to fruit opening / to the sweet marrow / of the seed.*” How might we too witness and pay homage to the transformation occurring within our lives? This writing session invites us to take note of the transformative forces moving within our hearts and within our world.

Vocation

We've often heard Frederick Buechner's definition of vocation as that place “where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need.” This writing session explores that meeting point and looks for the thread of vocation woven through the fabric of each of our lives.

Wonder

“I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing,” wrote e.e. cummings, “than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance.” As we enter the season of darkness and light, we reflect on the gift of wonder and how we keep it alive.

Multi-Session Series (most series topics can be offered individually as well.)**The Yin-Yang of Writing (five-part series)**

The old teachings of Taoism remind us of the fertile terrain that is found on the borders – the line between this and that, or yin and yang, where differences meet, where word touches silence and wave meets the shore. This five-part series explores these meeting points, the edges present in our world, and the fertile ground found in the margins. **Session One: Yin-Yang; Session Two: Thresholds; Session Three: Inner/Outer; Session Four: Self/Other; Session Five: Reality/Imagination.** (

Standing on the Threshold (four-part series)

A threshold, whether physical or emotional, is a place of great vitality and exchange, where new greets old, where outside meets inside, where stranger crosses over to become friend. This guided writing series invites you to explore the thresholds in your own life as places of heightened awareness and possibility. **Session One: Then and Now; Session Two: Turning Points; Session Three: Inner and Outer Identity; Session Four: Being and Becoming.**

Then and Now

A threshold is a place of heightened awareness – physically, emotionally and imaginatively. Behind you, as Rilke says, “all is known to you,” and before you, the vast unknown of the future opens up. Like Janus, the ancient god of gates and entrances whose two faces looked forward and backward at the same time, we will look at our lives in different directions, exploring the dynamic possibilities of our own thresholds.

Turning Points and Tipping Points

What are some of the formative moments in your own life when you took a turn in a new direction? Perhaps a mistake opened up a new opportunity. Perhaps a new understanding about yourself changed the way you saw the world. With stories, poetry and writing prompts, we’ll consider these moments and the thresholds they create in our lives.

Inner and Outer Identity

Each of us has hidden facets of identity that we carry within and others that we more freely present to the world. Who we are includes both. In this session, we will explore the meeting place between our inner and outer selves and the act of holy relationship that occurs when both identities are seen and known by another.

Being and Becoming

The thresholds of our lives can carry both thrill and threat. The dynamics of change in our lives can be exhilarating or frightening. How can we better navigate the currents of change, and what are the rudders that might help us? We’ll consider how poetry and other tools of expression can help guide us.

OTHER PROGRAMS AND WORKSHOPS:

A FRAME IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS: how to talk about peace and justice

Ever wondered how to get your message across more effectively? Whether we're writing letters to legislators or newspaper editors or composing announcements for fellow congregants, what we intended to say may not be what is actually heard if we don't begin by building the right frame for our message. This 2-hour workshop offers practical tips for being heard, *especially* when your message runs counter to the thinking of the day.

Additional topics or variations on the above themes can be developed for retreat keynote addresses, writing sessions, worship services or other gatherings. **For more information, or to schedule a session, contact the Rev. Karen Hering, karen@unityunitarian.org or 651-228-1456, ext. 128.**