



Chalice Circle Packet

October 2020

Naming What We Trust in Untrustworthy Times



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Unity Church-Unitarian, St. Paul, Minnesota unityunitarian.org

TRUST

Years ago, visiting Lake Superior with a college friend, we walked out on the glassy landscape of that frozen Great Lake. Enjoying the March sunlight already warm on our faces, we stood still, taking in the scene with appreciation and wonder, until a loud crack thundered through the ice beneath our feet. My friend Tom, possibly drawing from old boy scout training or engineering concepts he was then studying in college, swiftly and gently spread his body flat across the ice, distributing his weight. I, on the other hand, could not have tried harder to crack the ice myself, jumping straight up in the air and coming down hard with all my weight focused on two feet tightly held together as if to pack a greater punch.

Fortunately, the ice held. We slithered safely back to shore. But the unnerving experience comes back to me now in this time when so much of the ground beneath our feet is thunderously cracking and shifting dramatically, impacted by a worldwide pandemic as well as the significant effects of both climate change and long-term systemic racism. Where do we find a trustworthy place to perch and shelter when so many foundations are deeply cracked and unreliable?

I find wisdom in Tom's approach – the inclination to widen what we trust, to increase our points of contact, to distribute our awareness beyond the smallest sense of self to a larger wholeness. This is, isn't it, the wisdom of the safety net, tied and stretched across space to catch and hold us when we fall? Each of us – across all time – is born into a net of relationship and connection, an ecology of being, that will not let us go. Can we remember this, in the throes of upheaval we are experiencing now? Can we widen what we trust to include others, whose wellbeing is – always – inextricably bound up with our own?

J. Ruth Gendler, offering a personification of Trust, begins with its lineage: "Trust is the daughter of Truth," she notes. To which one might well ask: how do we trust the many truths being delivered today that are uncomfortable or painful, rife with uncertainty and loss, both anticipated and already experienced? What do we trust when, now and historically, our systems and institutions fail to deliver justice, when our society fails to preserve peace, when our communities fail to

offer shelter, when our best efforts fail to extinguish the flames raging both literally and metaphorically?

Some will answer by mistrusting truth itself; but we've seen where that leads. Undermining truth, also known as denial, creates the most untrustworthy ground of all. What if, instead, we look compassionately into the painful truths of history and the present day to notice another truth embedded with them in the nature of life itself – the truth of connectedness and the promises offered by countless efforts by many people, years ago and again today, mending the nets of relationship so long and badly torn?

Fittingly, Gendler's brief passage personifying Trust ends by looking forward. Following its lineage into the future, she notices what Trust begets. And this is why trust matters, not just for us, but for the longer arc of time and life. Trust, Gendler writes, "is the mother of Love."

If we each pick up one torn thread in the net that holds us all, our work of mending can reconnect us to the larger truths of love. And so we find our place in the longest lineage of Trust that both supports and depends on us.

Karen

Karen Hering

Associate Minister

adapted from the October 2020 issue of *CommUNITY*

Spiritual Practices

Option A

Trusting Stillness and Motion

Here at Unity, we like to say we are a community of faith that helps us find and keep our balance. Which is, perhaps, another way of saying it helps us find trustworthy ground. For some of us, this might call up the stability of stillness – finding a balanced pose, settling into it and keeping it. For others, it might be the balance that can only come from motion. Think of the balance that allows a two-wheeled bicycle to stay upright. It depends on motion.

Most of us learn to trust both of these, but we might have a preference for one or the other that allows us to more easily trust the stability of stillness or the balance requiring motion. Consider whether you trust one of these more than the other, literally and metaphorically. Do you feel your trust rise when you are standing, sitting still or lying down? Or when you are moving? Do you trust your circumstances and relationships more when they stay the same, or when they shift with change and growth? What you trust at this time in your life might be different than other times. Ask yourself which of these feels more trustworthy now.

In truth, every life depends on both stillness and motion. Even the rooted oak tree depends on its acorns to roll away, finding open ground in which to grow. And even the shark, which does not sleep, finds its own way to rest, eyes open. As humans, developing a practice to increase what we trust can begin with naming what is more challenging for us to trust and taking small steps toward discovering and developing ways to trust that too. If leaving your home feels untrustworthy in a time of COVID, can you develop other ways of venturing “out” – with a face mask, in a car or even virtually by internet or phone? If walking has become untrustworthy as your legs or balance have grown unsteady, would a cane or a walker or a wheelchair make some form of personal movement more trustworthy again? If personal fears or anxieties make meditation or quiet time by yourself feel too risky, how might you practice short passages of stillness in the quiet company of others that could begin to build your confidence in the trustworthiness of your own heart?

Make a short list of things that are hard for you to trust. Then choose one entry from your list, and name something simple you might do or try each day to explore and built your trust in that. Practice this daily, modifying it as you like, and noting at the end of a week’s time whether and how it has affected your trust. Come to your circle prepared to share your practice and your discoveries.

Option B

Trusting the Other ¹

What and whom do you trust in the midst of change? Is it limited to the familiar? Does it include people who are different from you, or is it narrowing down, excluding those labeled as “other” for any reason? Does your trust include the different parts of your own changing identity, or do you also consider some parts of the person you are becoming as an unwanted “other”?

This is especially common when we experience significant losses. Well beyond the challenges of the losses themselves, the stigma of labels such as unemployed, lonely, homeless, widowed, divorced, disabled, depressed or anxious often stirs a wild mix of emotions when newly affixed to us. What can be trusted when the very circumstances we have regarded critically when they happen to others now occur in our own lives? Not only will this make it almost impossible to trust the changes we are experiencing, it may be difficult to trust ourselves – and the person we are becoming.

This exercise asks you to experience and name something larger than you that you do trust. And from that experience, to consider other sources of trustworthy support and affirmation that you might be able to share with others – and with “the other” within you.

Sit quietly in a chair for a few minutes of deep breathing. Notice how the chair supports you, and how the floor supports the chair. Consider the building that supports the floor, and the earth that supports the building. Open your awareness to the reliable force of gravity that holds all of this in place, usually without our notice.

Ask yourself, on this day, where do you feel a sense of belonging that you trust? Begin large, perhaps with nature as a whole, then as you practice this each day, get more specific. Consider any relationships, communities or traditions that welcome and support you, even as you change. Are there others you have not claimed before, where you feel a growing sense of new belonging now? How might you become more centered in any of these, old or new, as you live through this time of change? What would it mean to trust – and love – the parts of yourself you would rather not claim, especially aspects of your identity emerging as you cross your threshold?

Each day, end your time by choosing one sense of belonging you trust and write briefly (a single paragraph is enough) about it beginning with this prompt: **If I let myself belong to you....**

Before coming to the circle, review these daily writings and consider what you have noticed about what you trust now.

¹ Adapted from *Living in the Between: a thresholder’s guide to personal and global change*, by Karen Hering, to be published by Skinner House in 2021.

Option C: Trusting Life²

Our ability to trust life is related not just to what happens to us but also what we choose to focus on. This exercise invites us to use intentional focus to strengthen our trust in life by noticing the three most treasured moments of each day. It's a simple but impactful practice of writing a "love letter to life" at the end of each day. It asks us to choose three moments and writing a single sentence in present tense about each one before going to sleep at night.

You might encourage this practice of focusing throughout the day by reciting Donte Collins' poem, each morning:

Daily Mantra

Repeat after me:

I will be generous with my love today
and trust that life will do the same.

Here's a link to an article that explains the ritual and its potential:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/13.7/2012/02/09/146472775/the-pulse-and-beat-of-a-daily-valentine-ritual>

Try it out for a week or even two. Put your own spin on it. Come to your group ready to share your journey.

² Adapted from the Soul Matters packet on Trust (<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com>).

Questions to Ponder

Read through the questions below and notice which one(s) resonate with you. One or more of the questions might seem particularly compelling – or some might stir resistance in you. Either of these reactions might make the question fruitful to consider. Choose just one and take time to consider it, over several days if possible. Write it down on a piece of paper you carry in your pocket. Or take a picture of it with your phone. Or record it in your journal – and spend some time, each day if you can, reflecting on it in writing or otherwise, noticing where it leads you and what you learn from it and your response to it.

1. Who has taught you the most about risking trust? What did they teach you and what impact has that had on your relationship with yourself, with others and with the sacred?
2. What have you trusted since childhood and still trust today? What have you never lost faith in?
3. When and how have you changed what you trust? What caused that change and what does it mean to you and your relationships and your faith life today?
4. Are you trusting or ignoring your gut or intuition right now? Why or why not?
5. What does the phrase “moving at the speed of trust” mean to you?
6. Do you trust your body and the knowledge you get from it? Has this changed over time?
7. What would happen if you trusted that you are right where you are meant to be? That life is exactly what you need right now?
8. What do you trust more – yourself, other individuals, a community, an institution? How does that shape your choices and your faith?
9. Have you ever been surprised that someone was willing to trust you?
10. When broken trust left you broken-hearted, what voice in your head or word from a friend helped you pick up the pieces?
11. Have you ever felt betrayed by your country? By its leaders, its people, its institutions? What do you trust in it today?
12. What would it mean to trust people to be who they are rather than what you wish they were?
13. You’re worried about how this thing in front of you is going to work out. Might it be possible to trust that you will be fine either way?
14. What have you learned about trusting grief, rather than trying to make it go away?
15. Has it ever been hard to trust that your children will find their way? How does that impact your relationship with them?
16. **What’s your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it. Or maybe the question or call you need to hear is waiting in one of the quotes listed below. Consider looking there!

Resources

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. They will not be analyzed in our circles. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to live faithfully with an ethic of hospitality.

Word Definitions & Roots

Trust

believe in the reliability, truth, ability or strength of

- allow someone to have, use, or look after with confidence;
- commit (someone or something) to the safekeeping of;
- have faith; confidence; hope
- place reliance on (luck, fate, or something else over which one has little control)

Word Origin

Middle English: from Old Norse traust, from traustr 'strong';

Wise Words

If you visualize it, if you can even have faith that it's there, for you it is already there. ... [D]uring the early days of the movement, I believed that the only true and real integration for that sense of the beloved community existed within the movement itself. Because in the final analysis, we did become a circle of trust, a band of brothers and sisters. So it didn't matter whether we were black or white. It didn't matter ... whether you were a Northerner or Southerner. We were one.

Congressman John Lewis

As soon as you trust yourself, you will know how to live.

~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

If the people cannot trust their government to do the job for which it exists - to protect them and to promote their common welfare - all else is lost.

~ Former President Barrack Obama

Faith is an inner quality that unfolds as we learn to trust our own deepest experience.

~ Sharon Salzberg

You must trust and believe in people or life becomes impossible.

~ Anton Chekhov

at my core i want to love and be loved, to trust and be trustworthy. i want loving and trusting to be the primary ways i spend my time, the primary skills i hone, the way i define community, the liberation path. intimately, yes, but i also want to live on a planet that i know loves me and get to experience that love. i want to live with people i can trust to make decisions from a foundation of love.

here i mean love as a good parent loves: nourishing, patient, abundantly feeding, carrying without complaint, cleansing, comforting without the kind of judgment that shrinks, holding in complexity.

trusting the way healthy lovers trust – not trusting in a staying the same, but trusting the other(s) to constantly change, with integrity. to change in ways that unveil and fortify our whole selves.

~[adrienne maree brown](#)

Everyone wants a place where they feel safe, where they feel like they might know what's going to happen tomorrow and that they could wake up in a universe in which they feel supported. Where we know we can practice our ways and not be jailed or censored or anything. Most people want

that. But I think the state of the state is marked by a great insecurity, a great insecurity running through everyone, whatever so-called side you're on. And so I think people are really looking for connection and trust to build some kind of stability — and for some kind of leadership in which we have leaders who are trusted because they have a history of compassion, of knowledge, and they're willing to work across any kind of political lines. Those are real leaders. The real leaders care about the people, not about the opinion of those who are going to give them money for their campaigns.

~ Joy Harjo, U.S. poet laureate, "[Everyone Wants a Place Where They Feel Safe](#)," *Washington Post*, January 14, 2020.

Poetry

"the most sincere trust, is that which lives between me and my body.
to sleep is to let go.
to be cast out to sea and awake dry by morning"

~ Donte Collins, *Unity Church's artist in residence*
Fall 2020, [Elephant Journal](#)

Fault Line

Did you ever think there might be a fault line
passing underneath your living room:
a place in which your life is lived in meeting
and in separating, wondering
and telling, unaware that just beneath
you is the unseen seam of great plates
that strain through time? And that your life, already
spilling over the brim, could be invaded,
sent off in a new direction, turned
aside by forces you were warned about
but not prepared for? Shelves could be spilled out,
the level floor set at an angle in
some seconds' shaking. You would have to take
your losses, do whatever must be done
next.

When the great plates slip
and the earth shivers and the flaw is seen
to lie in what you trusted most, look not
to more solidity, to weighty slabs

of concrete poured or strength of cantilevered
beam to save the fractured order. Trust
more the tensile strands of love that bend
and stretch to hold you in the web of life
that's often torn but always healing. There's
your strength. The shifting plates, the restive earth,
your room, your precious life, they all proceed
from love, the ground on which we walk together.

~ Robert R. Walsh, *Noisy Stones*, Skinner House
Books, Boston: 1992.

"Trust does not lead us to flee responsibilities, but
rather to remain present in places where human
societies are in turmoil. It enables us to keep going
forward even in the face of failures. This trust
makes us able to love with a selfless love.

"Today, many young people across the earth are
trying to heal divisions in the human family. Their
confident trust can make life beautiful around
them. Are they aware that, so often, a hope shines
out in them?"

~ Brother Roger Schultz of the Taize community in
France

Daily Mantra

Repeat after me:

I will be generous with my love today
and trust that life will do the same.

~ Donte Collins, *Unity Church's artist in residence*
Fall 2020

Affirmation

With faith to face our challenges,
With love that casts out fear,
With hope to trust tomorrow,
We accept this day as the gift it is --
A reason for rejoicing.

- Gary Kowalski

Trust

It's like so many other things in life
to which you must say no or yes.
So you take your car to the new mechanic.
Sometimes the best thing to do is trust.

The package left with the disreputable-looking clerk, the check gulped by the night deposit, the envelope passed by dozens of strangers—all show up at their intended destinations.

The theft that could have happened doesn't. Wind finally gets where it was going through the snowy trees, and the river, even when frozen, arrives at the right place.

And sometimes you sense how faithfully your life is delivered, even though you can't read the address.

~ Thomas R. Smith, *Waking before Dawn*, Red Wing, MN: Red Dragonfly Press, 2007.

Blessing for the Brokenhearted

There is no remedy for love but to love more.

—Henry David Thoreau

Let us agree
for now
that we will not say
the breaking
makes us stronger
or that it is better
to have this pain
than to have done
without this love.
Let us promise
we will not
tell ourselves
time will heal
the wound,
when every day
our waking
opens it anew.
Perhaps for now
it can be enough
to simply marvel
at the mystery
of how a heart
so broken
can go on beating,
as if it were made
for precisely this—

as if it knows
the only cure for love
is more of it,
as if it sees
the heart's sole remedy
for breaking
is to love still,
as if it trusts
that its own
persistent pulse
is the rhythm
of a blessing
we cannot
begin to fathom
but will save us
nonetheless.
—Jan Richardson

excerpt from the poem, "Working Together"

So may we, in this life
trust

to those elements
we have yet to see

or imagine,
and look for the true

shape of our own self,
by forming it well

to the great
intangibles about us.

~ David Whyte, full poem available as an [audio and written file online](#)

Music

For a playlist inspired by the opening reflection on this month's theme and prepared by a Unity member, visit this [Spotify link](#). (Note: you may have to register for a free Spotify account to listen to more than 30 seconds of each song.)

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0aT5q52EFG80x2Ah5qpRGS?si=GJO291CzQjWeKK8viS2rOw>

Videos & Podcasts

[Natural Law, by Faith Spotted Eagle](#), a 3-minute video explanation of the Dakota trust of the animal and natural world.

[The Science of Trust: Economics and Virtue, On Being Interview with Paul Zak](#)

"We've culturally moved from seeing Wall Street as an icon of thriving civil society to discussing its workings with book titles like *House of Cards* and *Animal Spirits*. As part of our ongoing *Repossessing Virtue* series, we look at what science is learning about trust, fair play, and empathy..."

Excerpt: "I discovered that trust was sort of the big gun economists have been looking for. It's really the most powerful lever we've found to date to understand why countries are rich or poor..."

[How to Build \(and Rebuild\) Trust, by Francis Frei, 15-minute Ted Talk](#)

Trust is the foundation for everything we do. But what do we do when it's broken? Harvard Business School professor Frances Frei gives a crash course in trust: how to build it, maintain it and rebuild it -- something she worked on during a stint at Uber. "If we can learn to trust one another more, we can have unprecedented human progress," Frei says.

[We've Stopped Trusting Institutions, 15-minute Ted Talk by Rachel Botsman,](#)

Something profound is changing our concept of trust, says Rachel Botsman. While we used to place our trust in institutions like governments and banks, today we increasingly rely on others, often strangers, on platforms like Airbnb and Uber and through technologies like the blockchain. This new era of trust could bring with it a more transparent, inclusive and accountable society -- if we get it right. Who do you trust?

[Do You Trust the Police: the people speak](#)

In July 2015, VICE News traveled around the world speaking to people about what they think about the police, and the role law enforcement should play in society. 4-minute video

[The Freedom of Real Apologies, On Being Interview with Layli Long Soldier](#)

Poet Layli Long Soldier, with dual citizenship in the U.S. and the Oglala Lakota nation, considers how apologies often fail to repair broken trust when they are inauthentic and incomplete. Long Soldier's collection of poetry titled, *Whereas*, is a response to the U.S. government's official apology to Native peoples in 2009, which was done so quietly, with no ceremony, that it was practically a secret.

Articles and Online Sources

["For Our White Friends Desiring to Be Allies," by Courtney Ariel, Sojourner Magazine, August 16, 2017](#) On how to be trusted as a white ally.

[Restoring Social Trust is Essential](#) by David Brooks
"What you see then is not merely a disagreement about trade or this or that, but two radically different modes of politics, which you might call high-trust politics versus low-trust politics..."
<https://www.timesunion.com/opinion/article/David-Brooks-Restoring-social-trust-is-essential-12988950.php>

Books

[Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America](#)

[Michael Eric Dyson](#)

On facing the fact that trust has been broken: "Short, emotional, literary, powerful-*Tears We Cannot Stop* is the book that all Americans who care about the current and long-burning crisis in race relations will want to read... Dyson argues that if we are to make real racial progress we must face difficult truths, including being honest about how black grievance has been ignored, dismissed, or discounted." (from Goodreads)

[The Compassionate Instinct: The Science of Human Goodness, by Dacher Keltner, Jason Marsh, Jeremy Adam Smith, NY: W.W. Norton, 2010.](#) Thoughtful essays on scientific understandings of happy and compassionate

individuals, strong social bonds and trust, and altruistic behavior. An on-line excerpt on [“Why Trust Matters”](#).

[**The Body Is Not an Apology, by Sonya Renee Taylor**](#), Berrett-Koehler, 2018.

Trusting the body.... World-renowned activist and poet Sonya Renee Taylor invites us to reconnect with the radical origins of our minds and bodies and celebrate our collective, enduring strength.... When we act from this truth on a global scale, we usher in the transformative opportunity of radical self-love, which is the opportunity for a more just, equitable, and compassionate world--for us all.
(from Goodreads)

[**When My Tummy Hurts: An Acupressure Book for Kids \(and their grown-ups\), by Molly Glasgow**](#)

When My Tummy Hurts uses fun illustrations and detailed instructions to help children and adults use simple acupressure techniques to improve their overall health and wellness. You can help the child in your life take charge of their body's wellbeing while having fun in the process!

Movies

[**Moonrise Kingdom**](#), 2012 feature film directed by Wes Anderson, on the trustworthy friendships that see us through the storm.

[**Spider-Man Into the Spider-Verse**](#), 2018 feature film in which teen Miles Morales becomes the Spider-Man of his universe, and must join with five spider-powered individuals from other dimensions to stop a threat for all realities.

[**How To Train Your Dragon**](#), 2010 family film on friendship and trust.

This packet was created for use at Unity Church-Unitarian, St. Paul, Minnesota, and includes excerpts from the Soul Matters Packet on Trust (<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com>).

[unitychurchunitarian.org](https://www.unitychurchunitarian.org)