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C O N G R E G A T I O N

## Soul Connections Packet

“Connections”

July/August 2017

## *What does it mean to be a community of CONNECTION?*

On our last Sunday worshipping at United Lutheran, I asked those present to write down something they appreciated about being at United Lutheran for those two years. People wrote all kinds of things: the gym, foosball, the generosity of our hosts, the stained glass windows, all of us there all together at one worship service. We wrote them down on colorful pieces of paper. Later I collected them, recorded them, and posted them on the bulletin board at United Lutheran as a thank you. I didn't know what to expect when I asked that question, and it turned out to be a lovely testament to the connections we made to that place and to one another while we were there.

The next day, when the movers came to take our possessions back to Unity Temple, I found myself alone in the sanctuary. All evidence of our congregation's presence there had been removed. But as I sat there, I thought of all that had taken place there--the babies and children we had blessed, the people we had said goodbye to there, the various joys and sorrows that had been in our hearts when we came to church, all the growth, a particular sermon here or there. I had not expected to be sad at all, but I found myself a little weepy for the way that space had held so much for us, and the way it connected us to each other and to all that had happened in our various lives. I live close to United Lutheran, so I see it almost every day. From now on, as I gaze at it, I will feel connected to it, knowing how it was a special place for us for those two long years.

In some ways, it's hard to believe we were out of our own building for two whole years, especially on that first Sunday back for worship. Everyone who had a regular seat in the sanctuary found it right away and it felt reassuring to me to look out and see how things felt so familiar. It doesn't all look the same, of course--nothing is falling apart AND there is much evidence of an infinite amount of love and care and thoughtfulness that has gone into restoration. Seeing all that, I am struck by the fact that we are mere stewards of a building which was gifted to us, and which we pass on to those who come after us. Connections to the past and to the future....

While it was an incredibly joyful return, I could not help but think of those whom we love who were not with us when we came back to Unity Temple. Now that we're back in that space that is familiar to so many of us, it seems like even those who died should be sitting in their regular pews.

At the same time, there were babies and young ones who were born into our congregation who had never been inside Unity Temple, not to mention those who joined us while we were in exile, and are experiencing the return home in a totally different way.

This summer will be a time of many transitions in the life of our congregation--coming back to our worship space, getting to know our building again, moving into our offices and new classroom space at 1019 South Boulevard, going back to a two worship service structure, among other things. It is a time to be mindful of the many connections among us, between us, and all around us.

Emily

## **SPIRITUAL EXERCISE**

Who or what do you need to connect – or re-connect – with in your life?

Your spiritual exercise for this month is to connect – or re-connect – with a person, place, or idea that helps you to Listen to your deepest self, Open to the gifts of the world, or Serve needs greater than your own. Perhaps it's an old friend or family member that always tells you the truth or has information to share. Maybe it's a relationship that needs healing. Maybe it's the writings of a philosopher you studied in high school that changed the course of your life. Maybe it's the ocean. Whatever it is that is calling to you for connection or re-connection – follow it. And because for many of us this exercise will require us to be in touch with another person, travel to a different place, or do a bit of reading.

Come to your meeting ready to share about who or what you connected or re-connected with and what that process was like for you.

## **Questions to Wrestle With**

1. Who or what do you need to connect with in your life?
2. Is there a person or a place you need to connect or re-connect with?
3. Is there an idea you once held dear that you want to hold close again?
4. Have you lost yourself – the still, small voice within – amidst the daily grind?
5. How do the connections in your life fulfill you?
6. What disconnection in your life needs attention?
7. What closed doors around your heart does your deeper self long to be opened or dismantled?
8. What relationships do you need to own up to contributing to disconnection?
9. In Marge Piercy's poem *The Seven of Pentacles*, she talks about the connections that grow slowly. What connections are growing slowly in your own life? Looking back over your life, what connections can you see that have grown over time? Are there deep connections that have grown quickly in your life? What is the harvest for you?
10. In Howard Thurman's writing, he speaks about the dust and grit of the journey, the daily wear and tear that takes us away from our moments of high resolve. What daily wear and tear is keeping you from your values these days? What helps you to "keep fresh before me the moments of my high resolve?"
11. In the story that Jack Kornfield shares, the mother does the unthinkable. When have you been called to do the unthinkable to benefit the greater good – or your own healing – in your life? Is this a story that you can relate to? What else could the mother have done? What do you imagine that you would do – or want to do – in her shoes?

## READINGS

### **The Seven Of Pentacles** by Marge Piercy

Under a sky the color of pea soup, she is looking at her work growing away there actively, thickly like grapevines or pole beans as things grow in the real world, slowly enough. If you tend them properly, if you mulch, if you water, if you provide birds that eat insects a home and winter food, if the sun shines and you pick off caterpillars, if the praying mantis comes and the ladybugs and the bees, then the plants flourish, but at their own internal clock. Connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow underground. You cannot tell always by looking what is happening. More than half the tree is spread out in the soil under your feet. Penetrate quietly as the earthworm that blows no trumpet. Fight persistently as the creeper that brings down the tree. Spread like the squash plant that overruns the garden. Gnaw in the dark and use the sun to make sugar. Weave real connections, create real nodes, build real houses. Live a life you can endure: Make love that is loving. Keep tangling and interweaving and taking more in, a thicket and bramble wilderness to the outside but to us interconnected with rabbit runs and burrows and lairs. Live as if you liked yourself, and it may happen: reach out, keep reaching out, keep bringing in. This is how we are going to live for a long time: not always, for every gardener knows that after the digging, after the planting, after the long season of tending and growth, the harvest comes.

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**The Moments of High Resolve** by Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman— minister, beloved Christian mystic and author and former spiritual advisor to Martin Luther King, Jr.

Despite the dullness and barrenness of the days that pass,

if I search with due diligence, I can always find a deposit left by some former radiance,

But I had forgotten.

At the time it was full-orbed, glorious, and resplendent.

I was sure that I would never forget.

In the moment of its fullness,

I was sure it would illumine my path for all the rest of my journey.

I had forgotten how easy it is to forget.

There was no intent to betray what seemed so sure at the time.

My response was whole, clean, authentic.

But little by little, there crept into my life the dust and grit of the journey.

Details, lower-level demands,

all kinds of cross currents-- nothing momentous, nothing overwhelming, nothing flagrant--- just wear and tear.

In the quietness of this place,  
surrounded by the all-pervading Presence of God, my heart whispers:  
Keep fresh before me the moments of my High Resolve,  
that in fair weather or foul, in good times or in tempests,  
in the days when the darkness and the foe are nameless or familiar,  
I may not forget that to which my life is committed.  
Keep fresh before me the moments of high resolve.

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### **Why I Make Sam Go to Church** by Anne Lamott *Traveling Mercies*

I make him because I can. I outweigh him by nearly seventy-five pounds.

But that is only part of it. The main reason is that I want to give him what I found in the world, which is to say a path and a light to see by. Most of the people who have what I want—which is to say, purpose, heart, balance, gratitude, joy—are people with a deep sense of spirituality. They are people in community, who pray, or practice their faith; they are Buddhists, Jews, Christians—people banding together to work on themselves and for human rights. They follow a brighter light than the glimmer of their own candle; they are part of something beautiful. I saw something once from the Jewish Theological Seminary that said, “A human life is like a single letter of the alphabet. It can be meaningless. Or it can be part of a great meaning.” Our funky little church is filled with people who are working for peace and freedom, who are out there on the streets and inside praying, and they are home writing letters, and they are at the shelters with giant platters of food.

When I was at the end of my rope, the people at St. Andrew tied a knot in it for me and helped me hold on. The church became my home in the old meaning of home—that it’s where, when you show up, they have to let you in. They let me in. They even said, ‘You come back now.’

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Let us take care of the children, for they have a long way to go.

Let us take care of the elders, for they have come a long way.

Let us take care of those in between, for they are doing the work.

African Prayer

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Our 7<sup>th</sup> Unitarian Universalist Principle states: we are all part of an interconnected web. Here at Unity Temple I have experienced the blessings of being loved, feeling supported and being perceived as enough. In our Joys and Sorrows, part of the service, we share what is on our hearts and we can experience shared love and support. What each of us experience matters. We matter. We are interconnected. What happens to one, happens to all. Like the spider's web/ when touched/ every part vibrates/ reacts/ is impacted. Our Unity Temple community is part of my web, our web. When we are touched by each other- whether by words, music, chants, poetry, hugs- we vibrate and are changed. I believe it is essential to: "show up", to be each other's witness, to be present for and with each other. Thank you for showing up today. Sometimes we give and sometimes we receive, together we share, and from this we live. We always matter. For me to Live By Heart means to experience connection...Kinship... I access these connections thru Meditating-using guided imagery, and also by imaging my connection to the earth, sky and all the people. My *almost* daily practice is to sit quietly. I look out into the garden next door to my condo and over the treetops that I know are in Austin Garden. I notice the air temperature, if it's breezy or calm, the sky and clouds, the colors of the trees/leaves as they change with each season, the birds songs, flight and interaction, my neighbors as they leave their homes and I experience *these* connections as Kinship. Then I read a poem or reflect on an inspiring statement that has recently come to my attention. Then after taking several cleansing breaths, I begin a silent, guided meditation. It takes as long as it takes and when it feels complete, I open my eyes...I take another deep breath and sit quietly. I reflect on the experience and then I journal about it. I can experience a sense that...what happens to one happens to all...Kinship.

-Carol DiMatteo, Member of UTUUC

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"In face of a terminal diagnosis ... the only question worth asking is 'Where do we go from here?' And part of its answer must include the word 'together.' Everyone suffers. Yet not everyone despairs. Despair is a consequence of suffering only when affliction cuts us off from others. It need not. The same suffering that leads one person to lose all sense of meaning can as easily promote empathy ... to see our own tears reflected in another's eyes is the most holy of intimacies. We enter the sacred realm of the heart, where the one thing that can never be taken from us, even by death, is the love we give away before we go."

-Rev. Forrest Church, from his sermon "Facing Cancer with Lessons Learned from my Parishioners." This sermon can be found at <http://www.uuworld.org/spirit/articles/107973.shtml>

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In his book, *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry: How the Heart Grows Wise on the Spiritual Path*, meditation teacher Jack Kornfield tells the story of a fourteen year-old boy confined to a rehabilitation program for juvenile offenders in the District of Columbia. The boy had shot and killed an innocent teenager to prove himself to his gang. As Kornfield tells the story, throughout the trial, "the victim's mother sat impassively silent until the end, when the youth was convicted of the killing. After the verdict was announced, she stood up slowly and stared directly at him and stated, 'I'm going to kill you.' Then the youth was taken away to serve several years in the juvenile facility.

After the first half year the mother of the slain child went to visit his killer. He had been living on the streets before the killing, and she was the only visitor he'd had. For a time they talked, and when she left she gave him some money for cigarettes. Then she started step by step to visit him more regularly, bringing food and small gifts. Near the end of his three-year sentence she asked him what he would be doing when he got out. He was confused and very uncertain, so she offered to help set him up with a job at a friend's company. Then she inquired about where he would live, and since he had no family to return to, she offered him temporary use of the spare room in her home.

For eight months he lived there, ate her food, and worked at the job. Then one evening she called him into the living room to talk. She sat down opposite him and waited. Then she started. 'Do you remember in the courtroom when I said I was going to kill you?' 'I sure do,' he replied. 'I'll never forget that moment.'

'Well, I did,' she went on. 'I did not want the boy who could kill my son for no reason to remain alive on this earth. I wanted him to die. That's why I started to visit you and bring you things. That's why I got you the job and let you live here in my house. That's how I set about changing you. And that old boy, he's gone. So now I want to ask you, since my son is gone, and that killer is gone, if you'll stay here. I've got room, and I'd like to adopt you if you let me.' And she became the mother of her son's killer, the mother he never had."

(Kornfield, 235-6) (excerpted from a sermon by the Rev. Jen Crow)

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"If we want to support each other's inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard." - Parker J. Palmer

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"We gather today, sharing a common interest in communicating compassionately. We approach one another in a spirit of curiosity, with open minds and open hearts, with a view toward building a deeper sense of community and connection." - Vid Axel, with inspiration from an adapted reading by Peter Lee Scott which was included in the *Covenant Group Facilitator Training* binder

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## WEB RESOURCES

Rachel Stafford "The Point of Being Alive"

A blog entry about every day encounters and connections.

<https://www.handsfreemama.com/2016/01/11/one-long-overdue-question-and-a-sky-of-possibilities/>

An interview with artist Chris Jordan, some of whose work explores the ties between beauty and

grief and the interconnectedness of all living things. Here is the link:

<http://www.dailygood.org/story/493/an-abiding-ocean-of-love-a-conversation-with-chris-jordan-li-sa-bennett/>

Video which tells a little about each person who you encounter, set in a hospital.

<http://www.onbeing.org/blog/an-empathy-video-that-asks-you-to-stand-in-someone-elses-shoes/5063>

Story about a boy adopted from Romania, and teaching him to be connected.

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/317/unconditional-love?act=1>

## SONGS

With a little help from my friends	Lennon/McCartney
The more we get together	Traditional
Make new friends (round)	Traditional
Love grows one by one	Carol Johnson
You've got a friend	Carole King
Lean on me	Bill Withers
Building bridges (round)	Women of Greenham Common Peace Occupation

All of these songs can be found in the Songbook: Rise Up Singing!

If you have suggestions for future resources packets—in any form: readings, movies, web resources, books, songs, etc.—please submit to [soulconnections@unitytemple.org](mailto:soulconnections@unitytemple.org).

September's theme is Welcome.