

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fort Myers
Order of Worship
June 8, 2025

*** Please rise in body or spirit*

Gathering Music

Welcome Jennifer

Good morning to all of you joining us live and on Zoom.

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fort Myers where our mission is to Love, Grow and Serve. I wish everyone a Happy Pride month! Pride Month commemorates the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in New York and celebrates the LGBTQ community and the fight for equal rights.

At UUCFM we are people of many genders and sexuality; gender diversity is sacred. It's the foundation of our denomination. We celebrate pride month all year long!

My name is Jennifer Grant and I am a Worship Associate and Past President of our congregation. I share today's pulpit with Andrea Joy, fellow Worship Associate and current President of our congregation. I am joined by our music director Jon Dalton, and our growing choir, and Jeff Letts, our organist. And an incredible tech team that makes a blended service possible.

We would like to extend a special welcome to our guests this morning. We hope that you find a welcoming friend, or our words bring you spark. With the world we live in today, it is comforting to find a safe space, to be yourself and be accepted. Please complete a "**Connection Card**" found in the Narthex at the Welcome Table or virtually in the chat box. The most important gift you can give us is a

chance to get to know you!! Members may use the card for a change in contact information or a caring concern you want our Pastoral Care Associates to address.

Today's service will NOT follow the usual format - Don't worry we will still have the usual church elements. With responsive readings interspersed within the sermon, each of you will participate in the words of our message. And don't worry - there will be hymns for singing. Each of you will get the opportunity to dance – whether you stand or stay seated, whether you are here in the sanctuary or if you are on Zoom, everyone will learn simple movements – Dance is truly THE universal language.

**Possible greet of Zoom gallery onto our screens, with Zoom having view of sanctuary- Greeting and Welcoming our Zoom congregation*

Call to Worship *May Our Work Be Blessed*

UUCFM Choir lead congregation in the chant

****Chalice Lighting**

Each week we light this chalice, flame and chalice the sacred symbols of our Unitarian Universalist faith, and then we speak the covenant that we make with each other. This shorter covenant is the covenant that many Unitarian Universalist congregations use in services, as it is a fundamental expression of our UU values, and how we are in relationship with each other based on those values.

Let's share that covenant with each other now

****Covenant** by James Vila Blake

Love is the spirit of this congregation and service its law. This is our great covenant: To dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another.

****Opening Hymn # 1009** *Meditation on Breathing*

Stones of Intention Jennifer

If you have a stone with you this morning, I invite you to hold that stone in your hand, close to your heart. During the musical meditation, come forward to place your stone in the bowls with others in this extended beloved community. Allow your stone to symbolize your intentions, reflections, prayers, joys, sorrows, or milestones in your life. You may also use the chat box to write any joy or sorrow virtually.

Final Stone

I will place a final stone - to represent Pride month! While some companies, local and federal governments have put a damper on Pride Month - I say let's all sparkle and shine brightly in celebrating our community where we are safe to express who we are and who we love. Here at UUCFM we are people of many genders and sexuality; **gender diversity is sacred. It's the foundation of our denomination. Let's sparkle as we celebrate and honor the LBGTQIA community.**

A Story for All Ages Andrea

In wishing to create this service that explores the full Congregational Covenant of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fort Myers, I wanted to define better for all of us what Covenant truly is. In the nearly year and a half that I have been at UUCFM, I have found Covenant to be so important in the way I express my faith. Some of the things I've learned about covenant:

It is, in a sense, what Rev Arthur called our Congregational Bill of Rights. It helps us to express what we can expect from each other.

Covenant is a foundation. It helps to define the walls and the structure and the form. It defines the boundaries, the container of how we are in

relationship with each other. It helps us to express the things that we place upon the walls of our home to decorate, to help express who we are, within that structure. It provides the roof that protects us from the rain and the sun and helps preserve that home. Yet there are doors and windows in this structure. The ways in which we can see the world beyond our own walls, so that we may learn more about the people around our home. The ways in which we open the Doors of Community to welcome in all people, to offer the shared safety of our home.

Covenant should be our inspiration to be our best selves, not the policing of each other. Covenants help provide that spark for us, showing us how we can stretch to become our best Selves together.

Covenants are our collective commitments that we make to each other, to help us express our relationship to each other and the rest of the world around us. Our collective commitments are the landscape of how we are together. The words of the covenant are the map to help us find our way

Covenant is the invisible thread that allows us to claim and be claimed by our faith tradition; to be connected to each other; aligned with our vision of Beloved Community, across our differences.

UUCFM Covenant

Dedicated to freedom, equality, and human dignity we covenant together and commit ourselves to accept our diversities and seek harmony where there is discord, support one another and nourish healthy, loving, just and equitable relationships. We further agree to share in the continuing work of articulating our beliefs and values and to devote our time, talent, and resources to whatever the tasks require. We seek to develop the trust and love that will enrich and strengthen us all as members of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fort Myers.

Please join me in the responsive reading - I will read first and then you will respond

I call that church free which enters into covenant with the ultimate source of existence

That sustains and transforming power not made with human hands

It binds together families and generations, protecting against the idolatry of any human claim to absolute truth or authority.

This covenant is the charter and responsibility and joy of worship in the face of death as well as life

I call the church free which brings individuals into a caring trusting fellowship,

That protects and nourishes their integrity and spiritual freedom; that years to belong to the church universal

It is open to insight and conscience from every source; it bursts through rigid tradition, giving rise to new and living language to new and broader fellowship.

It is a pilgrim church, a servant church, on an adventure of the spirit

The goal is the prophethood and priesthood of all believers, the one for the liberty of prophesying, the other for the ministry of healing

It aims to find unity in diversity under the promptings of the spirit "that bloweth where it listeth and maketh all things new.

Sermon

Covenant on screen, highlighted first line

Dedicated to freedom, equality, and human dignity we covenant together and commit ourselves to accept our diversities

There's a lot packed into these few lines. So let's try to unpack it in small pieces. What does it mean to be dedicated to freedom, equality, and human dignity?

Dedicated is defined as being devoted to, or having single-minded loyalty or integrity. It means that it is an incredibly important focus. So we place our devoted focus on Freedom- the right to speak, act, or think, or even Be, as one wants, without restraint. On Equality- all people having the right to the same status and opportunities, and, dare I say, Equity would be included in how we view that equality, in that we recognize that not all of us start from the same place, and that there needs to be adjustments to correct imbalances before we can even strive for equality. Fairness versus sameness, but we seek to include all. And a devoted focus on Human Dignity- that each individual possesses an inherent worth and value, with no conditions placed on that. Every single person deserves respect, and is entitled to having that worth and value acknowledged and protected.

We covenant together and commit ourselves to accept our diversities- We find our connections and commit to each other, we make promise to each other to seek to be our Best Selves together in our striving for those things that we share devotion for. Understanding that we are a diverse group, made up of people who come from a range of social and ethnic backgrounds, of different genders and sexual orientations, from a variety of economic lifestyles. Accepting that each of us has a different perspective and respecting each perspective.

****Hymn #1051 We Are**

and seek harmony where there is discord,

We seek to find harmony even when there is discord, meaning we seek to find a pleasant combination of ideas and feelings and emotions, a blending of our diversities, and a cooperative existence together, even when there is disagreement or conflict. We have a very important way of helping us to maintain that here at UUCFM- we have a Respectful Relations Team. This Team is here to coach in the communication process, to promote mutuality and consent. They can offer opportunities for deep listening and restorative processes when conflicts become more heated.

RESPONSIVE READING #596 *Boundless Goodwill* Jennifer

Please join me in the responsive reading - I will read first and then you will respond

Let us cultivate boundless goodwill

Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state

Let none in anger or ill-will wish another harm

Even as a mother watches over her child, so with boundless mind should one cherish all living beings

Radiating friendliness over the whole world

Above, below, and all around, without limit

support one another and nourish healthy, loving, just and equitable relationships- We pledge to offer each other encouragement and

compassion, and assistance when needed, as an expression of our support

for each other. We seek to fuel the mutual respect and open communication that allows us to care for each other, to make decisions together, to value each other equally, to share in each other's joys and each other's sorrows. We create a shared bond and a partnership with each other in this relationship.

Hymn #325 *Love is a bridge*

We further agree to share in the continuing work of articulating our beliefs and values

We agree to continue our work by expressing and sharing and speaking about our beliefs and values. That's something that seems to be difficult for UUs. Ours is a faith born on the freedom to worship in whatever way our Spirit calls us to, in whatever way suits our own belief system, in whatever way brings us to the Divine or Source, however we feel we are drawn to find Truth. We're not a faith that believes in proselytizing, and sometimes spending our time with others and expressing what our values are and what our faith means can make us feel like we're proselytizing. But it's part of our job to share the joy we have in this Love based faith that people can be drawn to when all they have had is fear based religion. I've found myself expressing what our values are, what a Unitarian Universalist is, to my bus drivers on occasion. Some have wondered what this building is that they come to that they drop me off at and pick me up from every week, sometimes multiple times a week. When I say that this is a congregation, they understand that this is a religion of sorts, and then they often ask me what does this mean, what do we believe, how do we worship, however they feel comfortable wording these questions. I love being able to explain to people that a UU congregation welcomes everyone, and that means ALL people, regardless of any of those things that tend to divide us, because we accept diversity in all forms. Regardless of what their belief system is, what their faith is, because our whole worship is about Love and Community. I have had wonderful conversations with drivers about the need to center everything that one does in Love, and that that is not an exclusively

Christian concept, not even a Christian concept for many Christians these days. One of the reasons I loved when General Assembly voted last year to accept the flower that expresses our principles is that it makes it easy for me to remember, on the fly when I'm not expecting or prepared, what principles I can highlight to the people that are asking me these questions. I can remember JETPIG fairly easily- Justice, Equity, Transformation, Plurality, Independence, Generosity/Gratitude. It truly is a wonderful thing to be able to share those concepts with people, even if they never thought to come to a service, or have no intention of attending a service. It's not about having people come here and join us, although that is a wonderful opportunity if it happens, as it allows us to once again show our Radical Hospitality. It's about letting people know what we stand for, it's about letting people know about the world that we envision and seek to create.

Responsive Reading #594 *Principles and Purposes for All of Us*

Jennifer

Please join me in the responsive reading - I will read first and then you will respond

We affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person

We believe that each and every person is important

We affirm and promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations

We believe that all people should be treated fairly

We affirm and promote the acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth

We believe that our churches are places where all people are accepted, and where we keep on learning together

We affirm and promote a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

We believe that each person must be free to search for what is true and right in life

We affirm and promote the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process

We believe that all people should have a voice and a vote about the things which concern them

We affirm and promote the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all

We believe that we should work for a peaceful, fair, and free world

We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are apart.

We believe that we should care for our planet earth

and to devote our time, talent, and resources to whatever the tasks require.

Whatever the tasks require- and that leaves the open ended concept of “the tasks”. Not having been here for the writing of this covenant, I cannot speak to what was considered then, but to my thinking, from the perspective of the congregation that is here at this very moment, the tasks are varied. Certainly a primary “task” is worship, what we do here every Sunday as a community, but included in that task of worship is community because community is at the center of who we are. As we look toward the greater community, one “task” may be spreading the word of who we are and that we are here, because we are also an oasis, a sanctuary, from the world that tends to look inhospitable at this moment.

Another important UU “task” is social justice, and with the resources we

have here in this congregation, we do a fair amount of outreach. Many people have written letters, called representatives, worked with other groups, to help change proposed legislation, to help preserve some of the rights of those who are at greatest risk.

We have considered our country to be founded on freedom, as laid out in the Bill of Rights in our Constitution, and today we find ourselves faced with those freedoms being threatened, with our Constitution threatened. Today, as UUs, we find ourselves called to speak up to protect and preserve those freedoms. We saw a wonderful turnout of people from this congregation who attended the last rally to speak out to tell our elected officials to keep their Hands Off the things that we consider important in our society. This Saturday there will be another rally, the No King's rally, to let our elected officials know that we will not stand for the overreaching of power and ignoring constitutional law. We have used our voices to speak out For justice. What a beautiful fulfillment of that "task".

Community Sharing Partners have been a "task" that this Congregation has excelled at. Having dedicated the resources of our offerings during Sunday services has provided a financial donation to a number of sharing partners over the years. Those sharing partners are organizations that offer support and help to many of the marginalized in our greater community.

On a more practical level, another "task" is the maintaining of this beautiful space we have here. Many people over the years have dedicated much time and talent, and resources, to not only keeping the grounds at UUCFM looking beautiful, but also by creating ways in which we can utilize the resources of UUCFM to help support this congregational campus. The very many people who have served as governance here, who have served on various committees, over the many years that this congregation has existed, have absolutely stepped up to spend their time and talent on any of the numerous "tasks" that are required to help to grow and nourish a healthy congregation. And even if you don't step into a role of governance, or are not able to serve on Committees often, you have fulfilled the needs of this congregation by simply being here, whether you're physically here inside this sanctuary or are watching and participating via zoom.

Hymn #1028 *Fire of Commitment* (1st verse only)

We seek to develop the trust and love that will enrich and strengthen us all as members of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fort Myers. Developing trust and love comes from the

With our theme for the month being freedom, we also need to recognize that there is freedom in having covenant. Having covenant allows us the freedom to feel safe with each other. Having covenant gives us the freedom to understand expectations of how we interact with each other, of how we will be there for each other, of how we create relationship with each other. Having covenant gives us the freedom to know that we can hold each other to those relationships.

Responsive Reading #733 *A Place of Meeting* Jennifer

Please join me in the responsive reading - I will read first and then you will respond

Out of wood and stone

Out of dreams and sacrifice

The People build a home

Out of the work of their hands and hearts and minds

The People fashion a symbol of reality

May this house be truly a place of Meeting

Meeting one with another

In warmth and joy and openness

Meeting one with another in courage and love and trust

May all who enter here trust one another so surely that they dare to share the deep fires that burst into anger as much as the sweet springwaters that well into laughter; the slow erosion of wounded tears as much as the soaring song

May these walls know silence as a hundred hearts search inward
Each for its own small spark of hope that might otherwise
Be snuffed out in the noise

**May these rafters hear the voice of the child
As surely as that of the orator, and the sound of the lute.
The clack of the typewriter, the swish of the broom, and know that all
are as holy as the shout of a million stars**

May the rain fall lightly on this house, the sun shine warmly; the winds
blow softly, and bless it as a place of joy and peace

Offering Jennifer

As we come together in the spirit of generosity, we are reminded that our gifts extend beyond financial contributions. Each of us carries unique talents and valuable time that can greatly enrich our community. Whether it's lending a helping hand, sharing a skill, or offering a kind word, your contributions in every form are threads that weave the fabric of our shared experiences.

One of the ways we live our spiritual values in the world is by making them real through the form of financial contribution. I invite you to enliven your commitment to this community and be generous in giving to support the work of this Congregation during this challenging time.

Every month we also donate funds to a local community organization who shares our values. Our Community Sharing partner this month is the Alliance for Fair Food (Coalition of Immokalee Workers).

Immigrants, mostly from Mexico and Central America, work tirelessly for low wages as they pick the fresh fruits and vegetables we consume. At the same time, they fear deportation and discrimination. The Coalition operates a modern day slave museum and a small store for farmworkers to shop with no markup. CIW and AFF have served as a beacon of hope for farmworkers as they confront human rights abuses, including systematic wage theft, sexual harassment and health and safety violations.

Your order of worship has information about Breeze, our new on-line giving platform, which will make it much easier for you to exercise your generosity. You have so many options to give. You may write an old-fashioned check and put UUCFM in the memo line, or use an envelope and check UUCFM and drop it into the offering basket. Or you can put cash or change into the basket. All undesignated contributions will be received by our Community Sharing partner.

** please include that there are envelopes in the pews, if they wish to donate to UUCFM, but do not already have one. Undesignated Envelopes will go to UUCFM.*

Offertory/Anthem *What the World Needs Now* UUCFM Choir

****Words of Gratitude**

By the work of our hands, and the work of our hearts, our love is made real. May we be grateful for all that is given, and grateful for all that is shared.

****Extinguishing the Chalice**

by Elizabeth Selle Jones

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Hymn # 414 *As We Leave this Friendly Place*

Closing Words Andrea

Deep peace of the running wave
to you

Deep piece of the flowing air
to you

Deep piece of the quiet earth
to you

Deep piece of the shining stars
to you

Deep piece of the infinite piece
to you

Farewell Words Jennifer

***No Organized** potlucks Over the summer. Our lovely kitchen volunteers have asked for the summer off, and potluck tends to be very more intensive for the kitchen volunteers. They will be providing us with coffee, but not going all out for potluck. If you still want to bring something yourself to share, you will be responsible for putting it out and cleaning up after it. You will also have to keep in mind not to be in the way of our kitchen volunteers when you bring your potluck dishes in. If anyone else wants to volunteer for hosting potlucks over the summer, that would be fabulous, and you should see Dorothy.*

June 22nd is Rev Sue's final service with us. It promises to be a very special service, and we would like to have a small gathering in Hobart Hall afterwards. In order to minimize the work of the kitchen volunteers, we are suggesting a pizza party with a cake. To pay for pizzas and a sheet cake, we are taking up donations. There is a jar out in the narthex over the next few weeks, and in Hobart Hall, as well.

Postlude

