

# Families

WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH



## Love Over Walls

Once there was a person named Zan who grew up in the city. But Zan wondered what it was like to live closer to wild animals. So they moved to a cottage in a clearing in the woods.

During the day, Zan worked in their garden to grow food. Sometimes people passing by stopped to talk and help. Some of their families had lived in these woods for generations. Zan learned to appreciate the birds that chirped “Wake up!” in the morning, the cicadas that hummed “Time to stop working!” at dusk, and all the other creatures that chimed in, day and night.

One day, Zan noticed someone across the clearing, hammering away, and went over to investigate. The person doing this work was excited to meet Zan. “Hi there! I’m Jaime, your new neighbor,” they said. “I’m building a lodge and nature sanctuary here. City folx need to get away from it all, sometimes! People are going to LOVE getting back to nature. This is the PERFECT

location, don’t you think?”

As Jaime went on explaining their plans, Zan was thinking that having such close human neighbors in the woods might not be perfect, at all! But Zan agreed. City folx would like to visit the woods. “That sounds nice,” Zan said. “Maybe I can help you, when I have time,” And they did. Zan helped Jaime make an organic garden and some bird watching lookouts. They shared with Jaime all they had learned from the local people about the different plants and wildlife of the area.

One day, Zan noticed some walls going up around the space. “What’s happening?” Zan asked Jaime. “I thought you were creating a sanctuary. But this will destroy animals’ habitats and separate people from nature.”

“Oh, those animals,” said Jaime. “You wouldn’t believe the trouble they are causing! They eat all the food from the

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organic garden! And I have to build these walls because your place isn't really nice to look at. You understand, right? Your chickens are loud and smell horrible. And I need a gate, with a lock, because otherwise, people will just come in!"

Zan did not know what to say. This was not what they had hoped for in a neighbor, nor for a nature sanctuary.

When the building was done, Jaime opened the gates for a big party. But Zan decided not to go.

After that, Zan saw the cars go in and out through the gate, carrying city visitors to enjoy the nature sanctuary inside Jaime's walls. And that's where Jaime stayed, as well.

Months later, Zan was surprised to find Jaime at the woods dwellers' regular meet-up. Jaime admitted that they had been feeling lonely in their lodge. "It's really nice when people visit, but nobody ever just drops by. The animals inside seem kind of sad, too. I'm thinking about selling the place and moving back to the city where there's more people. You know, a real community."

Zan had to speak up. "We are a real community," they said. "We are humans, plants, and animals. We all need different things to live, but working it out, and sharing when we can, is worth it."

Zan thought some more, and said, "When I am outside, in our clearing in the woods, I hear Nature gently asking me, 'How much space do you take up? How much space can you make for others?' I imagine it's hard to hear that question, on the other side of your wall."

Jaime's eyes got a little wide, but Jaime stayed silent. They had a lot to think about.

## EXPLORING TOGETHER

**Walls can be useful.** They make a good background for pictures! A wall can protect us from weather that's too hot or cold, a light that's too bright, or a noise that's too loud. Four of them can hold up a roof. ■ **What uses for a wall can you think of?**

**Walls can also make problems.** A border wall can keep the people on either side from helping each other. Even an invisible wall can hurt, like the segregation between white people and people of color in our country. When walls keep us apart, it's hard to remember: **Although we may be different, we all matter and we are all connected.**

### Draw On It!

What are some walls in your life? Draw a wall you know well. What, or who, does it keep in? Who does it keep out? Write or draw something you like about this wall. What don't you like about it?



### Just How Big is That Web?

UUs believe each one of us belongs to an interconnected web of life. How many people does that mean we're connected to? 8 billion!

Check out [www.census.gov/popclock](http://www.census.gov/popclock) for up-to-the-minute calculations of U.S. and world populations.





## Walls of the World

Sometimes a country builds a wall. Someone gets an idea to keep some people out and some people in. Maybe the leaders are afraid of invaders. Maybe the leaders worry what will happen if their country has to share its wealth with more people, or listen to newcomers' ideas.

Inside many countries are more walls. Many countries have prisons and internment camps whose people live behind a wall and are not allowed to leave. Inside are mothers who cannot be with their kids, and neighbors who cannot be with their communities.

### Think about it



How do you feel about separating people with walls? What would a world without walls be like?

Find out about some famous walls. Find out who built them, and why.

- The Berlin Wall (and the Iron Curtain)
- The Great Wall of China
- The US/Mexico Border Wall



The Great Wall of China

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**That kid's family has lots more money than we do.**

**That person is old! I'm a kid.**

**I don't understand the language that kid is speaking.**

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## The Bias Wall

Have you ever noticed a way you're different from someone else and let that stop you from getting any closer? If so, you have hit the bias wall.

Though it cannot always be touched, seen, smelled, or heard, the bias wall is one of the strongest at keeping people apart. The bias wall can make us forget that each person matters as much as another, and each one matters to the rest of us.

Learn how to detect the bias wall! If you think you've bumped into it, talk it over with someone. Try to find a way through it, or around it, before you make harmful decisions about whoever is on the other side. What could a door through the bias wall be? A handshake? A friendly question? A smile?

## Open a book together...

...and read stories where people choose love over walls.

In *The Other Side*, by Jacqueline Woodson, a fence cannot keep two girls from being friends.

The picture book *The Wall: A Timeless Tale* shows how our differences can make the world beautiful.



## What's a Wall For? A Mural!



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# Why Is There a Wall?

By Althea Smith

In the picture book, *Mira and the Big Story*, two villages sat on either side of a river, so close they could see and occasionally hear each other. In their isolation, each crafted stories about the other that may or may not be true. And yet, both people had “come from the same place...made of the same stuff.”

A wise elder taught, “there will never be peace in their valley until the people in both villages find a story big enough for all of them.”

In the book, Mira is a child who, in naïve curiosity, crosses the river and makes a friend.

If Mira were to look over the walls into prisons today, she might ask, Is this a separate village? Why is there a wall? Why are there mostly Black and brown people inside? She would be troubled to realize mothers were there, separated from their children. Why is this, when we are all “made of the same stuff”?

The fear of the other has fed institutional bias and contributed to a burgeoning prison industrial complex—a system that exists only to punish. A system so abusive should not continue to be

tolerated.

When people or society feel harmed, the instinct is to punish. This permeates all of our relationships and we teach it to children from a very young age. I am a mother who has reflected a lot through my life on what it takes to raise a child. I grew up with the idea of “spare the rod and spoil the child,” then learned in college a new idea, “proportional response.” I still have no idea what this is! But it’s clearly part of a culture of punishment, manifested in our prison system.

Is incarceration the best society can manage when someone’s very presence makes another feel harmed? Even before it has been determined if a rule was broken?

Part of the way I deal with these questions is to go to my faith. The UUA’s First Principle is the inherent worth and dignity of each person. The Seventh Principle teaches respect for our interdependent web. We are all worthy, and we are one village. How can we, as people of faith, accept a world that harshly sends people to prison? We need a new message. One which is focused on healing and forgiving.



**As Unitarian Universalists, how can we work to abolish prisons? They do more bad than good.**

■ What happens when your family encounters people who are different? How do you model curiosity about others, rather than fear?



■ How much do you use punishment with your children? When can you instead try for restoration of relationships?



■ Teach your child how to apologize when they harm others and to receive an apology when given.



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## FAMILIES: WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

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## FIND OUT MORE...about CLF Prison Ministry

■ The UU Church of the Larger Fellowship is a liberal religious network whose Prison Ministry invites people on both sides of prison walls into a beloved community. We are deeply committed to our First Principle that all are worthy of love, respect, and support—now, and not some future time when we are better people.

■ CLF serves more than 1,200 incarcerated Unitarian Universalists. We recognize that the current prison system is both racist and informed by white supremacy practices, as demonstrated by the over-representation of brown and Black people, and see abolition as an important part of our work. To find out ways for UU families to get involved, check out [www.worthynow.org](http://www.worthynow.org).