

Taking Joy Seriously

Service Description:

Taking Joy Seriously

Join Jennica Davis-Hockett in exploring how joy and community-building can be transformative forces in our lives. She shares a personal story of shifting away from internalized self-exploitation toward a more playful, liberatory approach—one that embraces rest, community care, and resilience. Using the Deeper Joy framework, and some very serious play, Jennica invites us to experience radically inclusive, accessible and spiritually grounded community. Presented by Jennica Davis-Hockett, UUA Youth and Emerging Adult Ministry Staff.

Suggested Readings

- Black Joy: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/promise-and-practice-joy-unspeakable-reading>
- Embodied, connected, pleasure: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/embodied-connected-pleasure>
- Blessed are the Magic Makers: <https://www.uua.org/braverwiser/blessed-are-magic-makers>
- Wanting to Break Free: <https://www.uua.org/braverwiser/wanting-break-free>
- To Soulfully Survive this World's Mayhem: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/benediction/soulfully-survive-worlds-mayhem>

Suggested Music

Jennica is providing you with the Deeper Joy Spotify Playlist. Feel free to use something from here or choose hymns that have a theme of joy.

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2EFg8uFUwJEk69eAvnJT9l>

Resources

Find the full Deeper Joy Curricula on the UUA website (<https://www.uua.org/lifespan/curricula/deeper-joy>)

Purchase the Deeper Joy map at the [UUA bookstore](#)

Taking Joy Seriously

Hi Everyone! I'm Jennica Davis-Hockett. I use she/her pronouns. I've got long, wavy brown hair, glasses, white skin, orange top and an orange and blue background with a bookcase. I work in Lifespan Faith Engagement and we're the office in our Unitarian Universalist Association that asks "what do we TEACH when we're together as Unitarian Universalists, and how do we teach it?" The HOW is my favorite conversation to have and it's the one I wish I was in person to have with you today. The most exciting way, to me, that we teach UU is through direct experience of the kind of world we're trying to co-create. And that is one of joy and liberation in beloved community. The way I get to do that in my work is by sharing about Deeper Joy, which is a compendium of songs, activities, practices and games for building radically inclusive, accessible and spiritually grounded communities. So, before I get to all that, I want to tell you about what happened in the lead up to recording this sermon for you.

Now, do any of you know who Rev. Leela Sinha is? Ok, Ze is an entrepreneurial community minister who wrote a book called *You're Not Too Much*. Ze taught me a new way to think about procrastination. So, Instead of my usual creative process, is which is to be really harsh with myself and berate myself for not “getting to the work” until right before the deadline and then sprinting really hard up to the final moments, which isn't even a shallowly joyful of an experience, Ze taught me that I could admit to myself that I know how much time it's going to take to complete the project, then carve out just that amount of time before the deadline to do the thing. Then, and this is key, using the time I usually spent berating myself to engage in rest and play. I loved this method because it moved me away from my internalized oppressive work ethic towards honoring the way I create and allowing for the creation to be inspired by and responsive to the moment. This pattern shift dovetails nicely with what I teach around Deeper Joy. So I wanted to try it on.

And then, just before the time I allotted to create, just before the deadline, a pipe broke and flooded our basement. Pretty soon after, the voices rushed in - I shouldn't have been so lazy! Now I have an emergency and am going to have to pull an all-nighter to get this sermon done! There's so much out of my control I should have been more prepared! Has anything like this happened to you? When you're trying to break a pattern, trying to do something new, trying to make a change and then wham, reality floods you (pun intended) with a bunch of reasons not to change?

But, there was no going back at that point. So, as I was packing boxes and moving stuff around in the garage to make room, I took some

cleansing breaths, paused and put a hand on my heart and thought - “I may not have chosen this challenge, but I can choose the response. What, what is the deeply joyful response to this emergent moment?” And here’s how Deeper Joy rushed up to meet me:

The deeply joyful response for that moment was to address the challenge in community rather than isolation. Doing it in isolation actually would have been the path of least resistance, the well worn pattern, and it was tempting for that reason. It wouldn’t require any reliance on others or vulnerability, at all. But despite the temptation to try to do it all with no help, I posted in the group chat that we needed help.

Do y’all have that? A group chat? Or whatever your version of, what I call, a care group? Maybe it’s a group text or in Signal, maybe it’s over email, it doesn’t matter the format. Maybe it’s your small group ministry, or your youth group or elders group at church. A care group is a small group of people who are important to you and you know you’re important to them. These are the people you can rely on in a pinch and who can rely on you. If you don’t have one of those, a care group, that is something not to procrastinate on because it takes time to build. One principle of Deeper Joy is that cohesive community is grown, not created overnight.

Let me show you the way I’ve operationalized this principle by way of the Community Building Map to Deeper Joy.

[start map sharing]

Behind me is an illustrated map depicting a variety of enchanting places. It has so much fun detail like the way the boats' flags are waving at each other in the Bonding Harbor and drooping lifeless in the Tepid Bay.

The locations on the map represent different "features" of a community based on what the group experiences together. A leader or facilitator has a number of choices to make about what experiences they want to offer the group to shape the desired features.

This is the way we talk about the different aspects or features of community building. We believe community building is non-linear and responsive, meaning you're going to meet your group wherever it's at and then you're going to take them where they need to go. You may visit the same location on the map multiple times and there's no predetermined final destination, where you "have arrived".

So, after I sent the mayday text to my care group I scanned the Deeper Joy map in my mind to situate this ad hoc moving team. We were definitely located in the Stretching River (another pun intended). The Stretching River is the place you end up when you experience trials, when you're problem-solving opportunities and challenges. These may arise naturally (in a congregational setting maybe the minister leaves and a search committee is formed for example, in my case it was a basement flooding), or they may be manufactured (think: ropes course, planning a worship service, something that is a growth opportunity.).

[end map sharing]

So, with a few comrades' help to mitigate the flooded basement, it was really looking like I was going to get this sermon to you by the deadline! I had found a way to resist the old pattern not once but twice! I interrupted the old pattern of being my own taskmaster or enforcer, first by choosing not to shame myself for my creative process and reclaim rest and play and second by seeking support rather than sacrificing my wellbeing to meet a deadline on my own. I was *doing joy* in the way Nick Montgomery and carla bergman define it in their book Joyful Militancy. They say joy is, I love this, "building the capacity together to get more free."

But, then I got very sick for a few days and had to ask for an extension anyway, but I was close! I was close to pulling it off in a deeply joyful way, despite the odds!

It feels like I'm spending a lot of involuntary time in the Stretching River these days, does it feel like that to you too? It seems to be costing more and more just to survive, and for those of us with marginalized identities, that's true even more so. It can be hard to find joy in times like these, it may even feel frivolous to seek it out. But, another tenet of Deeper Joy, and the one I believe most deeply, is that joy is a medicine that fortifies and repairs, joy is what helps us build thicker connections with one another. And those thicker connections are the foundation of resilient communities. I imagine that may be a reason some congregations are seeing an uptick in visitors lately. Because so many of us, within and beyond a congregation's walls or meeting time, are seeking that kind of resilient community.

Ok let's actually play with this Deeper Joy thing as a way of experiencing HOW we teach UUism. "How we teach," that's pedagogy. And the pedagogy of Deeper Joy is play! Play is how we learn how to be human with each other. The first principle of Deeper Joy is that play & practice are intrinsic to faith development & community building and that playfulness & fun are good for you. They're good for your wellness and good for your community's vitality.

We're going to play a game, or if you're feeling a bit serious about the ideas of play and joy today, we'll "engage in a practice," that can help you build your care group. So, one feature of a resilient community, something that helps them withstand the rapids of the Stretching River, is that they connect with each other on common ground without minimizing their differences, in fact they know their differences make them stronger. In the UU value system, that's what we call pluralism. On the Community Building Map to Deeper Joy we call that common ground area the Bonding Harbor and Opening Up Beach. And a game that's in the Bonding Harbor is called the [Mighty Wind Blows](#). Here's how you play:

[screen share instructions]

The person who is the lead introduces themselves, is greeted by the group, then picks something about themselves they might have in common with other members of the group.

Example:

"Hi I'm Jennica"

"Hi Jennica!"

The mighty wind blows for people who...have ever dyed their hair a color of the rainbow."

Everyone to whom this applies makes an agreed upon gesture noticeable to the lead. The lead then chooses someone to go next, who can accept or pass. The game ends when everyone who wants to has a chance to be lead.

So, first decide as a group what your signal is going to be. Y'all need to agree on a signal that EVERYONE can recognize. If there are folks who are hard of hearing, a physical gesture is more accessible than a sound. If there are folks with limited mobility the gesture should be something they can do without compromising themselves in any way. Now, if you've got multiple access needs, which is common, maybe you choose a physical gesture and a sound so that people can do and catch the signal in the ways that they can. Feel FREE to be as big or vocal or silly as y'all want, the important thing is it's accessible to everyone!

Choose your signal now.

I'll be the first lead to demonstrate. The first person to do the signal in response will be the next lead and then off you go! Feel free to keep playing until you're ready to move on. It's been a true pleasure to create and share this with you. I did it! I shifted my pattern towards more joy! And

I did it the deeper joy way, through play... or if you're feeling serious about it today, through practice.

Ok, Hi I'm Jennica

Hi Jennica

And the mighty wind blows for people who ate breakfast today.