

Let's Worship: Celebrating Ten Years on the Journey

Prelude: Somebody's Calling My Name

Rev. Monica L. Cummings

Good morning, family. (good morning) I am the Reverend Monica L. Cummings and on behalf of the Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee, I welcome you here this morning. Our opening words were emailed to me by a sister, friend and colleague and I do not know who the author is of the opening words, so if you happen to be sitting here this morning, let me know and I will definitely credit you for these opening words in the future. I will light our chalice then read our opening words.

May God bless you with discomfort,
May God bless you with discomfort,
at easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships,
so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger
at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people
so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace

May God bless you with tears
to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and war
so you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.

May God bless you with enough foolishness
to believe that you can make a difference in the world
so that you can do what others claim cannot be done
to bring justice and kindness to all of God's children¹.

Our opening hymn is "Enter, Rejoice and Come in" and please rise in body or spirit.

Rev. Jason Shelton

We're going to do this a little differently than you might have done it before. At a recent meeting here in Portland back in April Janice invited us into a moment that she shared with her sister at her installation in New Jersey of a reggae version of Enter Rejoice and Come in, which set Leon and I set to thinking...

Rev. Charles Bluestein Ordman

We gather together, pilgrims and pioneers, refugees and prophets, privileged and oppressed. We gather together, a community of communities, from across our continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the devastated regions of the Gulf Coast, to the northern climes of the desecrated boreal. We gather together, to worship, to celebrate, to find and make meaning. We give thanks for those who have labored with us and for us along the way. We especially express our gratitude and respect and heartfelt appreciation for former members of the Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee, for their dedication and energy and perseverance in our collective efforts to become a truly anti-oppressive, anti-racist, multicultural faith community. We remember the late Ruth Alatorre, And I would invite you, if your name is mentioned and you are in the room, to please stand, that you might be recognized, as we recognize Rev. Sofia Betancourt, Rachael Brown, Rev. Susan Suchocki Brown, Ken Carpenter, Dr. Ivan Louis Cotman, Rev. Sean Parker

¹Source: "Troubadour: A Missionary Magazine," published by the Franciscan Missionary Society, Liverpool, UK: Spring 2005. The full text of this poem can be found at: <http://www.coc.org/index.fpl/1262/article/2741.html>

Dennison, Robette Dias, Susan Gershwin, Rev. Galen Guengerich, Rev. James Hobart, Rev. Melvin Hoover, Dr. Jacqui James, Rev. Kurt Kuhwald, Susan Leslie, Matt Moore, Christine Murphy, Rev. Linda Olson Peebles, Emily Ricketts, Rev. Frank Rivas, Dr. Leon Spencer and Kim Varney.

We gather together, a religious association of some ten years on an intentional journey to fashion, to find and to forge wholeness and justice; compassion and beauty, beloved community and hope. Hope with good cause. We meet together – ten years on a journey – to meet and celebrate who we are, to share insights from along the way, insights which give meaning and hope to our lives, to learn from the wisdom of others that their truths may yet contribute to the value of our understanding and help to point us toward the terrain yet to be covered. We meet together, we share together, we learn together, we celebrate the road traveled thus far and we set our sights on the future, which beckons our faithful actions even now, still now, always now. We gather together, a community of memory and a community of hope and together, we worship.

Rev. Monica L. Cummings

Why I do this work. I do this work to honor my call to ministry, to answer the not-so-subtle inner voice demanding that I be accountable to the interconnected web of life. I do this work to honor the Unitarian and Universalists in our movement's past who were treated like strangers instead of being welcomed. I do this work for Unitarian Universalists who experience racism and are treated as 'The Other', here at GA and in UU congregations. I do this work because my conscience will not allow me to bear witness in silence. I do this work because if I do not do it, who will?

Rev. Charles Bluestein Ordman

The co-chair of our committee is Carolyn Cartland. She is unable to be with us in Portland this week, due in some degree to her accessibility issues, just having accessibility issues and how exhausting they can be. She was going to try and be with us by phone, but is not feeling well, so this is her statement that I will share with you now. So this is from our co-chair, Carolyn Cartland:

Carolyn Cartland, as read by Rev. Charles Bluestein Ordman

I do this work because it is a part of me. I do this work because I can, because I live with the benefits of unearned privilege and the pain of unearned discrimination. I do this work because doing so lessens my own guilt and anger and confusion. I do this work to bring some sense of order and justice to a world filled with chaos and injustice. I do this work because it is there to be done. I do this work because I have to. I do this work because I am a Unitarian Universalist. I do this work.

Julio Noboa

My spiritual journey began with a rejection of the fundamentalist biblically correct religion of my parents, may they rest in peace. I admire them, and any adult who chooses to live the deliberately restrictive life of a Seventh-Day Adventist, but for a young man, growing up in the late 1960's, dogmatic rule against dancing, drinking and going to the movie were made to be broken.

But in my very rejection of fundamentalist Christianity, I launched into a long search that brought me learnings through many sources from Hinduism and the Baha'i faith to Carlos Castaneda and the Orishas of Santeria. These learning shaped my deepest spiritual values and these I nourished until I discovered this faith, our faith, the ultimate faith that affirms them all.

It is this deep affirmation of my most cherished values that first attracted me to our faith and continues to energize my work until today.

Mi jornada spiritual empezo con el rechazo de la religion de mis padres, que en paz descansan. Yo los admiro, y tambien a cualquier adulto que escoga la vida estricta de un Adventista del Septimo Dia; pero

para un joven, criandose en al ambiente de los anos '60, prohibiciones dogmaticas encontra bailar, tomar e ir al cine eran reglas para romper.

Pero en ma rechazo del cristianismo fundamentalista, empece una larga busqueda que me otorgo enseñanzas de muchas Fuentes, del Hinduismo, y la Fe Bahai, a Carlos Castenada y los Orishas de la Santeria. Estas enseñanzas formaron mis mas profundo valores espirituales y estos los cultive hasta que descubri esta fe, nuestra fe, la muy unica fe los confirma todos.

Es esta confirmacion profunda de mis sentido valores que me trajo a nuestra fe, y sigue animanda me trabajo hasta hoy.

Gracias.

Michael Sallwasser

Why I do this work. In 1980, a group of us were organizing a rally for the equal right amendment and someone asked the question why they, someone else, did this work? And she answered, "So I can sleep at night." That stuck with me. I realized that I too worked to end oppression so that I could feel comfortable inside my own skin.

But there is another reason I do this work and that is out of a sense of accountability. It was a year ago. I was standing at the back of the hall at the St. Louis General Assembly closing ceremony. I was explaining to Paula Cole Jones and Taquiena Boston why I couldn't move forward with an Anti-Racist agenda in the Pacific Southwest District. It was too much for me. I had a list of excuses. Their eyes narrowed and they gave me a look (like) "Who do you think you're fooling?"

I know I have the knowledge, insight, wisdom and passion to do this work and I am called to do it by people like Paula and Taquiena, who expect me to use my privilege, my gifts and abilities to make the world whole. To make myself whole.

Janice Marie Johnson

And why do I, Janice Marie Johnson, engage in this work. I affirm the need, hunger and thirst for wholeness. I believe that the call is for a healed and whole community. Why I call for people to engage in this work, I often ask myself why I continue to engage in this work – hurt after hurt after hurt after hurt. Why do I continue to answer this call?

In answering the question, my thoughts turned immediately to the Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed, African-American, Unitarian-Universalist minister. And I often return to his compelling words; words that consistently encourage me to move beyond fear of, and resistance to, change. His words:

To move forward as a denomination, we need first to ask ourselves "Why?" I think that there is really only one authentic answer. For yourself. For yourself, because you will feel more comfortable, in a multicultural, multiracial congregation. For yourself, for being part of an inclusive movement is more consonant with the self image you hold of yourself as a religious liberal. For yourself, so that the piece of you that feels guilty or angry about what we aren't can stop feeling guilty and let go of that anger. For yourself, because you want the whole world to know about liberal religion. For yourself, because you want a style of worship that strikes a deeper spiritual cord. For yourself, not because you should, but because you yearn to be different. Not for 'them', but for yourself. Our selves.

So I, Janice Marie Johnson, am called into this work, mindful of the many identities that I bring: as a woman of color, as a Unitarian Universalist, a Caribbean woman of African descent, as a mother, as a widow, as a daughter, as a sister, as an educator and surely as a human, I am called into this work, this work that surely does not happen in isolation. I am called to be deeply engaged in this work, with you. Yes. You.

Bob Gross

Why do I do this work. I've learned a few things over the last 45 years. Systematic racism is profound in our society – and it was created by white folks for their benefit early in our countries history. It has shifted, but it is maintained to this day – for the benefit of people who look like me.

As a slowly awakening, privileged white male. I have come to realize that I have a drive deep in my soul to help take apart this overwhelming wrong. I do this work because I want to become a whole human being, to become a genuine member of my entire human community. I also need to be a loving brother to ALL my sisters and brothers in this family. I do this work because I HAVE TO.

Now for a little commercial: To those of you who identify as white, I suggest that every one of you can be leaders who we're looking for and who we're waiting for – to do this work in your community.

Catie Chi Olson

My name is Catie Chi Olson and I do this work because as the mother of four children of mixed race, as a biracial woman growing up in the Midwest where I am the oldest biracial person I know that we are called to be a people of wholeness and walk together as we go.

Rev. Charles Bluestein Ordman

I am Charles Bluestein Ordman and I do this work because my mother, who died just a few months ago struggled to teach me that I was no better than anyone else. I do this work because I went to a Catholic grade school where I was taught to love my neighbor as myself and then I was asked the question, "Who is your neighbor?" and learned that the answer to that is, "Every man, woman and child". I do this work because I was of draft age during the Vietnam War and I began to discover that the world is incredibly broken and that the only hope of helping a broken world was to give witness to what is broken and to take action to heal the brokenness. I do this work because I am a Unitarian Universalist and I have learned from my Unitarian Universalism that I am a part of a broken whole that cries out for healing and that none of us are saved without all of us being saved.

Some stories along the way: When I went before the Ministerial Fellowship Committee a number of years ago and I was asked "What do you do about racism?" and I didn't have good enough sense to be embarrassed when I answered, "Oh, it's OK. I've taken care of that in my life." (laughter) To a few years later, that was Norma Poinsett, by the way, who asked me that. We'll name some teachers here. And then a few years later, being at General Assembly and the teacher was Bill Jones and Bill, for some of you who might have been there, held up a tube that had been in the center of a roll of paper towels or something at one point and asked what that object might be. People hollered out all kind of different names and, after he heard so many different names, he asked, "Who gets to decide what this is?" And I learned that I was part of a culture that got to decide things for other people and how incredibly unjust that was and that I could not sleep at night. I could not be in a world where I could hold my head if I wasn't doing whatever I might be able to do in order to end the ability of one group of people to name the experience of another group of people. I do this work because I realize that this is not just a personal matter, although it certainly is a personal matter. It is much more than that. It is a global matter. There is no such thing as individual redemption. When we struggle for each other, indeed, we struggle for all of us.

Catie Chi Olson

Welcome to this rejoicing, this celebration of our story. When we are young, people tell us stories. Many begin with "Once upon a time..." Some are cautionary tales like Pandora's Box and a few are told to instruct; to illuminate what it means to be human. The Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation

Committee sought to find out how we are as a people in this decade since our Association passed the two resolutions at the General Assembly in 1997: the first, Toward an Anti-Racist Unitarian Universalist Association and the second, Accessibility for People with Disabilities. Our report is called 'Snapshots on the Journey', and it is available in the front, at the back, online and in the IdBM booth.

For me, what the Snapshots report is most like is a family album of a road trip, with all its bumps and bruises and even glories. In this report, there is honest revelation of how difficult it is to have these conversations, and it is difficult. And it can be awkward and it can sometimes even be painful both for the giver and the receiver of the story. In reading this report, it is clear that no one in this Association believes that we have arrived at Wholeness yet. We are all still on this journey, it is still our work and I hope our joy.

In the request for proposals that has evolved into the new curriculum "Building the World We Dream About", our president reflected that "it is still the case that the most frequently asked question "How we can become more racially and culturally diverse. His response, always, is that the objective of finding a few more brown (dark) faces to make our white members feel better about themselves is not spiritually grounded. Nor will it be successful. Racial and cultural diversity will, I pray, come to Unitarian Universalism. But it will come, as we become known as a faith community that strives to live our open-hearted theology, and a faith community that is willing to be an ally in the struggle for justice." How then do we become known as a faith community? One very successful way is to show the world who we are, by the banners we chose to place on our buildings and the flags we choose to raise.

Just during my time in Portland, Rev. Karen Tse of Geneva told me how important one small benediction is by Wayne Arnason #698. It has become a beacon in her work to end torture in this century. "Take courage friends, the way is often hard, the path is never clear and the stakes are very high. Take courage. For deep down there is another truth. You are not alone." In her work with International Bridges for Justice, she endeavors to get this message to those who are suffering, and those who choose to risk, to stand up, for those who are still suffering torture around the world. We found in our Snapshots that many of us are struggling, many of us feel alone, but we need to link together at the district level or at cluster groups to help change that feeling that we are by ourselves in isolation.

Here's one of my stories. Last year, my favorite project from my hometown Minneapolis came -the aMaze Families All Matter book reading project. This program grew out of what could have easily been called a hate crime. A second grade girl looked through her the birthday cards, and found one that read "I hate you Girl Lover". Both her moms decided that the response could not and should not and would not, in their power be to punish the child that wrote that, who was after all a product of his environment. They chose instead to make a developmentally appropriate, anti-oppression book reading program that covers what it's like to be poor, or an immigrant or disabled or a person of color or a person from a queer family. This is a mirror for those who do not usually see themselves in our color, in our culture as well as a window into that experience. Working on this program moved me into ministry. I saw my class or third and fourth graders bravely write, sign their names to and deliver a request to the 7th and 8th graders of their school, demanding that they stop using homophobic names as taunts.

One of my favorite books from aMaze is The Other Side, where two girls of over a generation or two ago look at each other's lives – longingly - through a fence. One is black, one is white. The fence divides them physically less than the ideas of the people around. Finally the fence becomes the place they can meet to play, these young women become comfortable living in the borders. It is a beautiful book to look at and I hope my word inspire you to find it for yourselves and for your church.

Next year, we deeply hope to see the book “Journey from Calgary” the deep narrative of how this journey has been for the people of color and disability and the congregations of this Association. Extensive stories on this topic have been collected by editors Rev. Chip Rousch, Dr. Leon Spencer and Rev. Leslie Takahashi-Morris. The publication of this book has been a journey onto itself. We have also heard in our report that many people are reading, or hoping to read but have not yet, the book *Soul Work*, edited by the Rev. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Rev. Nancy Palmer-Jones. Be mindful of the title when you start this work, it is not *Soul Hanging Out Together*, it is *Soul Work*.

Over a year ago (my last story) my family had a house fire. In our recovery from this event, we decided on narrative family therapy. This approach is held to be Elegant, for it is the story that you tell that is how we share our lives, Efficient as it is the choice of the story that matters and Effective as the telling and the hearing of the story changes both teller and audience. We heard and told a variety of stories. And my favorite was from my youngest child. She advised us that getting fired was not fun and we shouldn't get fired again.

According to Narrative Therapy, we have the Story of our lives and the Reality of our Lives. The goal is to make these two become one. As a mother and future minister, I pray and hope and work for our story to become more like this: Once Upon a Time, my dear grandchild, Unitarian Universalist congregations almost all met in buildings not everyone could enter and had books not everyone could read and told stories not everyone could hear. If some people were browner than others, they were asked What they were, and no one took time to find Who they were or How they were. Then people decided to change their minds, Work on their Souls and Grow their Hearts deep enough and wide enough and gentle enough and brave enough for everyone who wanted to hear our good news to feel a warm welcome and an authentic invitation to beloved community and we worked together to change this world. Amen, Ashay and Blessed Be.

‘Come Together’ reprise

Janice Marie Johnson

Wholeness - reflect on the depth and breadth of your potential wholeness. Humanity – consider your journey to your sweetest sense of humanity. Richard Connelly reminds us that to be human is to be in transformation. Ever-changing, we are connected by physical, mental, emotional and spiritual forces more powerful than ourselves. We experience each moment of our lives with a sense of our relative powerlessness. We choose what we do within the limits of time and space, culture and society, of this and of that. As we live our lives, moment to moment, awareness of our powerlessness can, paradoxically, empower us and can allow us to see, what and who and where we really are. This awareness is possible for us in each moment within this specifically human awareness, a capacity for empathy and compassion connects us, consciously as well as unconsciously, to other human beings, to other living beings, to other living things, to all that is life.

Here we are. Reflect on your journey toward wholeness. Be aware – profoundly aware – of your failings, of your shortcomings, your growing edges. Reflect on your journey toward wholeness. Be equally aware of your strengths and your accomplishments. Give and receive tough love. Nurture sustenance as you share life's many lessons. Know that you are not alone. Find your community. If you cannot find your community, create that community. Be with your community and be your community.

He drew a circle that shut me out,
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win
We drew a circle and took him in.

May these words of Edwin Markham inspire us to create authentic, life-affirming community; beloved community, if you will. A community as a safe space for learning who you are. Community as a place for meeting people exactly where they are. Community, as a place to do the never-ending heart -work; the heart -work required to effect authentic transformation, from the most personal to the most institutional of levels.efforts. Reflect on your own personal commitment to this work, wherever. Wherever you are on your journey, there you are. Consider one little thing, one little thing and one not so little thing that you will do in the near future. I am inviting you to think about what you will do within the next seven days to further this journey toward wholeness. I further invite you to name that something, silently, to yourself, to the depths of your heart. And I urge you to do it. All of you.

Transformation begins when we make commitments and when we keep them. Commitments are required for the work that we are called to do. It is up to us; it is up to you; it is up to me. It is up to each of us – it is up to all of us to articulate this work, this faith-filled, faithful work to bring this faith to our lives. In so doing, may we find a shared home – a home with enough welcome space for all of our diversities. Returning to Markham’s words – “He drew a circle that shut me out...we made a circle that drew him in.” May we, each and every one of us, may we make the kind of faith-filled circles that draw in respect, equity and love.

Rev. Jason Shelton

This is called “There’s a River Flowing in My Soul” – a song that came to us from the Quaker hymnal, a song written/sounded by Rose Rennie Sanders and arranged by Kenny Smith from Cincinnati, First Unitarian Church in Cincinnati. I’ll sing it once through, just to make sure we all know it.

*There’s a river flowing in my soul 2x
And it’s telling me that I’m somebody
There’s a river flowing in my soul*

Reverend Jason Shelton

Please stand in body or spirit

*There’s a river flowing in my soul...
There’s a river flowing in my heart...
There’s a river flowing in my mind...
There’s a river flowing in my soul...*

Michael Sallwasser

Fall 2006. The Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee is meeting, is having its first face-to-face meeting of the current members. We are just getting to know each other when we receive word that Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley’s life is quickly slipping away. Marjorie’s connection to the committee is manifold – colleague, role model, foremother, inspiration and beloved friend. To honor her contribution to the Journey Toward Wholeness, we read her Litany of Restoration. As we reflect on her words, we realize that there were people who were not included. We sought new language that would widen the circle; that could make us whole. In her final days, Marjorie herself was engaged in this search, but there was precious remaining time and she was gone. Holding fast to the spirit of Marjorie’s words and mindful of all she had done to bring us to where we are on the journey, I wrote a new litany in her honor, dedicated to the memory of the Reverend Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, I share with you a litany of diversity.

If the colors of our skin or the lands of our ancestors are different,
It need not divide us.
If the genders we claim are different,

It need not divide us.
If the stages in our lives are different,
It need not divide us.
If our means of achieving the common good are different,
It need not divide us.
If who we love and how we love are different,
It need not divide us.
If the spiritual paths we follow are different,
It need not divide us.
If our abilities to think and do are different,
It need not divide us.
If our resources are different,
It need not divide us.
If we join spirits and hearts,
Our differences will not divide us, but deeply bind us together.

Rev. Jason Shelton

This is "Come and Go With Me"

(with Leon DunkleyDursley)

Come and go with me to that land,

Where I'm bound.

There'll be freedom in that land

There'll be justice in that land

There'll be singing in that land

Rev. Monica L. Cummings

Thank you, Reverend Jason Shelton and Leon Dunkley, for your music ministry this morning; indeed thank you. Our benediction - the act of sending healing energy into the world is known by many names and I prefer to call it prayer. Will you please pray with me:

Dear Unknown and Unknowable, yet known by many names. Let our voices be heard and let us be known by what we do. We are called to transform ourselves and to transform the world. We are called into wholeness and to love each other into wholeness. We are called into a journey that does not have a finish line. Dear Unknown and Unknowable, give us the strength and the courage to be the voice for the voiceless. Give us the strength and the courage to use our power and our privilege to help those who are exploited and oppressed, including those of us sitting in this room. Dear Unknown and Unknowable, give us the strength and the courage to live our values and our Unitarian Universalist principles to create a world where we want to live in and to create a world that we want to leave for our children and our children's children. It is said we are called to live it and to create it together, in community. Amen and Blessed Be.

NOTE: The Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee is graced by the presence and talents of Taquiena Boston, who serves as President Sinkford's representative and Simona Munson, who serves as support person in more ways than can be seen. Their wisdom and gentle guidance bless our work as we continue on this journey.