

OCTOBER 2017 | REV. ERIKA HEWITT, MINISTER OF WORSHIP ARTS, UNITARIAN  
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# The Promise and the Practice of Our Faith

Worship Guidelines,  
Components, & Service Outline



## What is ‘The Promise & the Practice’?

It’s a turning moment; a choice to listen deeply to the stories in our movement that have not been heard, and taken to heart, by all Unitarian Universalists. It’s a lamenting of what our Unitarian Universalist tradition and congregations have lost by being unable – or unwilling – to center people of color (or even, at times, to merely include them). The Promise and the Practice is a celebration of our shared commitment to live into a new chapter in the story of our UU faith.

## How is The Promise and the Practice Sunday different than the White Supremacy Teach-Ins?

Both events seek to draw attention to the presence and patterns of white supremacy in our UU congregations and systems. Both events also ask UUs to halt those patterns – individual as well as collective – as we build a new way together.

What’s different about The Promise and the Practice is its intention of creating a soul-deep space of feeling and experiencing the power of this moment in our UU story. These worship materials center the voices and stories of black UUs, so your entire worship service calls upon the lived experience of black religious professional as sacred text. This service invites white UUs to bear witness to that pain as a place of connection, recognizing all that’s been lost in our tradition.

Because The Promise and the Practice is an intentional centering of black voices – and in a departure from traditional “asks” – we highly encourage white

clergy, preachers, and other worship leaders to decenter their own voices and identity by **not writing sermons, homilies, or other significant worship material for this Sunday.**

To reinforce the feeling, heart-centered nature of The Promise and The Practice as an opportunity for atonement and re-creation – which is both complex and sacred work – these worship materials include a ritual (or, if you like, an embodied, participatory moment of healing) as a symbolic “turning” from past to future.

Finally, we ask that The Promise and The Practice be grounded in the opportunity for every Unitarian Universalist congregation to align its finances with our theology, and to pledge at least \$10 per member to this campaign. All gifts are needed, and every gift is appreciated. If your congregation is able to reach the threshold of \$10 per member, Black Lives of UU (BLUU) [will receive a dollar for dollar match for your contribution](#). Together, we’re striving to fulfill this \$1 million match opportunity.

## “We Will Story Our Own Lives”

The worship components in this packet were created specifically for The Promise and the Practice Sunday by black religious professionals who were compensated for their time, wisdom, and skills. Through dialogue and covenant, they chose to “story” their own lives – that is, to draw from their lived experience and make of it a text to be absorbed by UUs of all races and ethnicities. We’re grateful for the courage and vision offered by these writers:

- [Viola Abbitt](#)
- [Rev. Carol Thomas Cissel](#)
- [DeReau Farrar](#)

- [Adrian Graham](#)
- [Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson](#)
- [Rayla Baldwin Mattson](#)
- [Rev. Rebekah Montgomery](#)
- [Erica Shadowsong](#)
- [Connie Simon](#)

In addition to those worship resources, religious educator [Jae Pema-la Scott](#) created one-time religious exploration curricula for two age groups:

1. [Mending the Broken Chalice](#) (for K-5)
2. [Beginning Anew](#) (for Youth)

## Suggested Newsletter/Website Blurb

If you're wondering how to present The Promise and the Practice to your worshipping community in advance, these may be helpful:

- What would it be like if our UU worship service centered entirely around the voices and the experiences of black Unitarian Universalists? What truths might we hear, however difficult? What might we learn? How might these black UU leaders teach us to be better allies, better siblings in faith, and even better citizens in our community?
- In our commitment to *dismantling white supremacy as a system/being anti-racist/diversity/embracing the presence and leadership of people of color* (use the language most appropriate for your setting), white Unitarian Universalists are still learning to decentering our whiteness so that people of color are brought from the margins to the center. Join us as we practice that work, and promise a new way of being together.

# Worship Outline & Content

## Worship Notes

More and more Unitarian Universalist congregations are making an effort to indicate, in the weekly order of service, which authors and composers are people of color (POC). **Every writer and musician in this packet is a person of color.** Depending on how you utilize the following musical suggestions, it's possible to create an order of service that draws entirely from POC.

When it comes to weaving your worship service together, be creative with these materials! Note that the worship components below are presented in an order that reflects the intent and spirit of The Promise and the Practice: to shift away from analysis into deep-hearted listening; to inspire all UUs to co-create a new way forward for our faith; and to demonstrate significant financial support for BLUU.

Rather than trying to use every worship component suggested here, read through these materials and choose those that will most strike a chord in your congregation's worship life. For example:

- Instead of choosing one reading and one homily, you might use all three readings as the text for your service
- If you choose to utilize the ritual, you might omit the litany &/or the lamentation
- If you want to create a more embodied service, you might omit the homily in favor of a longer ritual, more music, and even part of Jae Scott's "Mending the Broken Chalice" curriculum.

## Suggested Music

These musical pieces have been curated by Amanda M. Thomas, Director of Music at Second Unitarian Church of Chicago, and Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout, Director of Worship and Music at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Ann Arbor:

- **Hymns:**

1. #1007, “There’s There’s a River Flowing in My Soul”
2. #1040, “Hush”
3. #153, “Oh, I Woke Up This Morning”
4. #1008, “When Our Heart Is in a Holy Place” (for the text: when we hear our voices in each other’s words, **then** our heart is in a holy place)
5. #95, “There Is More Love Somewhere.” (Dr. Rideout has also written a [reflection about this hymn.](#))

- **Choir pieces:**

1. “The Storm is Passing Over” by Charles Albert Tindley
2. “The Gift to Be Free,” arr. Dilworth (Dilworth is a POC)
3. “Stand by Me” Tindley, arr. Hogan (Tindley & Hogan are POC)
4. “Order My Steps” by Glenn Burleigh; “[I Don’t Feel No Ways Tired](#)” by James Cleveland (Rev. Cleveland is POC; excerpt: “*I don't feel no ways tired/I've come too far from where I started from/Nobody told me that the road would be easy/I don't believe He brought me this far to leave me.*”)

- **Choir pieces with a significant solo:**

1. “[Glory](#)” (from “Selma”) by John Legend
2. “[Make Them Hear You](#)” (from “Ragtime,” about police brutality against brown folks) by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty
3. “[I Believe](#)” by Mark A. Miller (Dr. Rideout comments: “The text was found on the wall of a concentration camp after the end of WWII. Excerpt: /

*believe in the sun even when it's not shining... I believe in God, even when God is silent)*

4. "[I've Been in the Storm So Long.](#)" arranged by Jeffrery L. Ames (Ames is a person of color)
  - **Pieces for Prelude, Offertory, Postlude:** "A Child is Born" by Thad Jones; any Rag by Scott Joplin

## Suggested Words to Include in the Welcome

When you welcome people to worship, you might include any of the following:

- "Our worship service this morning is uniquely prophetic: it calls to us who identify as white to listen, humbly and perhaps with some discomfort, to the lived reality of black Unitarian Universalists in our midst. This discomfort is both a gesture of hospitality to voices that have not been heard enough, and a sign that we're growing in the right direction."
- "If you're joining us today as a guest, know that you are witnessing this Unitarian Universalist congregation doing sacred work: collectively, we will wrestle with what it means to be a majority-white faith whose anti-racist intentions have not always been borne out. We invite you to witness this moment of transparency and vision, and to join us on future Sundays for a more traditional worship service."
- "We who are Unitarian Universalists often choose to make ourselves uncomfortable in the service of our meaning-making. We recognize our discomfort as evidence that we're growing. Today, if you feel discomfort arise within you – especially if you're white – we invite you to practice being curious, and to allow your discomfort to lead you to new learning."

## Call to Worship

- In her [call to worship](#), Viola Abbitt reminds us that “we are here today because we are mindful of [our] past, and because we have hope for the future.”

## Chalice Lighting

- Rev. Rebekah Montgomery’s [chalice lighting](#) names us as “a beloved people united in love and thirsting for restorative justice.”
- The [chalice lighting](#) written by Adrian Graham concludes by asking, “What does your heart know while beholding this holy fire?”

## Story for All Ages

Educator Erica Shadowsong explored her own cultural background to provide a [story for all ages](#).

## Reading

These personal reflections, each about five minutes long, are offered from the perspective of black Unitarian Universalists who have struggled to find belonging in our movement — or who have been disappointed and hurt by our UU people of faith.

- Connie Simon reflects on the fact that “when I look around on Sunday morning, I don’t see many people who look like me. In most of the congregations I visit, I don’t see anybody who looks like me. So I guess I



- shouldn't be surprised that [I don't hear voices of people who share my experience](#). But it still hurts.”
- Rev. Carol Thomas Cissel reminds us that [words matter](#) – and that when congregations fail to embody their claims to be diverse and welcoming, it's a hurtful experience for people of color.
  - Rev. Kimberly Johnson describes what [“Black joy”](#) means to her, and challenges Unitarian Universalism and Unitarian Universalists to claim Joy.

## Pastoral Prayer

For what might we pray, at such a moment as this?

- Connie Simon [invites us to pray](#) “for the courage not only to speak up, but also to listen, even when the words are hard to hear.”
- [“Let us have the wisdom,”](#) prays Viola Abbitt, “to lovingly have the conversations we need to have with each other, that we must have with each other, in order to growth this faith in radical love and inclusion.”

## Homily

At their core, the homilies here – each between ten and fifteen minutes – demonstrate vulnerable, bold truth-telling from the perspective of black leaders in our Unitarian Universalist movement.

- Rayla Baldwin Mattson [courageously invites white UUs to listen](#) to her painful reality of remaining silent in unwelcoming UU space.

- Rev. Rebekah Montgomery reflects on a formative experience from her young adult years, as a person of color witnessing a stumbling moment in our UU past, and why [our collective healing is not done](#).
- DeReau Farrar uses economic privilege as a springboard for his conviction that those with an excess of privilege must [denounce their privilege](#), and give it to those with none.

## Litany & Lamentation

Without recognition of the wounds in our UU past, it's not possible to engage in healing. These resources are another way to lift up the tender work of finding one another in the midst of our often-clumsy efforts to be a united people of faith.

- In Viola Abbitt's litany "[The Promise That Binds](#)," the congregation is invited to remember that "we are a covenantal people, and the promise of our faith, which was enough to bring us together, should have been enough to bind us together in love."
- In [Lamentation for Two Voices](#), Rev. Erika Hewitt and Rev. Rebekah Montgomery create a dialogue between white voices and voices of color, based on the writing of Michael Eric Dyson.

## Ritual

This [ritual by Rev. Carol Thomas Cissel](#) is a beginning, a starting point, a first step taken towards each other. In bringing it to life, you'll blend words, music, and movement while embracing the power of elements taken from the natural world.

Our ritual creates an opportunity for our congregations and communities to *Lament* what we have lost, *Petition* for a way forward, look inward and *Confess* our hopes and fears, and then set *Intentions* which honor the past, but lean strongly into the future.

*Note: if done thoughtfully, and depending on the number of people in worship (and your worship space), this ritual could easily take over ten minutes.*

## Call to the Offering

The Promise and the Practice of Our Faith isn't just a looking back and a turning moment before moving forward in a new way; it's also a call to extraordinary generosity: the sharing of congregational "treasure" to support Black Lives of UU (or BLUU). We recommend that the offering be gathered, and this challenge presented, near the end of your worship service.

You may want to invite the offering by showing [the video appeal](#) made by UUA President Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray and Lena Gardner, Executive Director of Black Lives of UU.

If you can't show the video, you can adapt its [transcript](#) to suit the needs of your congregation.

## Benediction

We invite you to close your worship service with a reminder about our ongoing commitment:

- Rev. Rebekah Montgomery writes, "[here we are reborn – forged by a greater courage...](#)"

- Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson riffs on a gospel hymn in her [“Hush”](#) benediction.
- [“We are not perfect, but we are perfectly fitted for this day,”](#) offers Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson

## Questions & Feedback

If you’d like to inquire about or respond to materials here, please contact [Rev. Erika Hewitt](#). Erika especially invites you to send your reports of how these materials worked well in your setting, and how they might be improved so that other congregations can have the most meaningful Promise & Practice Sunday possible. Finally, Erika promises to forward your praise and gratitude (i.e. fan mail) to the authors in this packet.