BECOMING A PEOPLE OF
the beloved community

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The term “beloved community” is one of those phrases we might hear but not fully comprehend its history and vision. This month, as we explore what it means to “become a people of the beloved community,” it is important to root ourselves in the history and meaning of this term.

The beloved community is one community. It is not an individual community, such as FUS or the Madison area, but a universal community. Most often associated with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., beloved community is described as “people of diverse racial, ethnic, educational, class, gender, sexual orientation backgrounds/identities entering into an interdependent relationship of love, mutual respect, and care.” Or “a simple working definition is a community ordered by love.” Centered in a relationship of love, social justice work is necessary to create beloved community. As noted writer and activist bell hooks reminds us, the beloved community doesn’t remove difference, it removes privilege.

While the concept of beloved community became mainstream through the Rev. Dr. King, his understanding is rooted in the work of religious philosopher Josiah Royce and theologian Howard Thurman. What is clear is that there is a distinctively religious context for the beloved community. To secularize the beloved community without acknowledging its roots dishonors the spirit from which it was born. As systematic theologian James Cone describes, “the white public and also many white scholars have misunderstood King, because they know so little about the black church community, ignoring its effect upon his life and thought.” Cone writes in Black Theology and Black Power that “the black church became the only sphere of black experience that was free of white power. For this reason, the black church became the center for emphasis on freedom and equality.”

While you don’t need a religious tradition to pursue the beloved community’s call to a radical love of all people and unrelenting work toward justice, the context is critical. As the Rev. Shirley Strong writes, “Many social activists have come to realize something is missing in the struggle for justice and human rights. We have replaced a larger vision of the beloved community with a less inclusive strategy of community-building and community organizing. In so doing, we have lost our connection of spirituality, in the sense of being connected to something greater than ourselves—something whose inherent outcome is the creation of the beloved community.”

Building the beloved community feels like an end goal—something we strive for and not something that already exists. However, the late Rep. John Lewis pushed us to reconsider this perception. Lewis asked, “what if the beloved community were already a reality, the true reality, and [we] simply had to embody it until everyone else could see?”

As we move into a month of reflection and consideration for what it means to “become a people of the beloved community,” may we hold the vision of what it means to be in right relationship with each other, committed to the challenging work of love and justice, and embodying it until all may see.

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1 https://www.8thprincipleuu.org/background  
3 ibid.  
4 https://chaplaincyinstitute.org/portfolio-items/toward-a-vision-of-beloved-community/  
When Kelly was an intern at the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, the services often ended with these words from Marge Piercy, “It goes on one at a time, it starts when you care to act, it starts when you do it again and they said no, it starts when you say We and know you who you mean, and each day you mean one more.”

These words were so well known in the congregation that most of those gathered would join in the benediction. It was a communal statement about who they wanted to be in the world, the kind of beloved community they were trying to create. It was their way of saying they wanted to create a community of radical inclusion, where no one was excluded, where each person was seen, valued, and known as beloved. This aspirational community is a beautiful thing, a tenacious affirmation of the power of belonging, and it is incredibly difficult to create.

Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, “Our goal is to create a beloved community, and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.”

What King speaks of here is a holy love, a love that is messy, difficult, and requires great courage. It is a love that will change us if we let it. The love needed to create beloved community begins by loving others as they are, with no qualifiers on who they are or what they have, with a love that encompasses everyone. This is not a passive love; it is not an easy love to hold. It is love in action, love that seeks to create and preserve community, even when that community is broken. It is the desire and the will to work for repair, restoration, and wholeness.

Beloved community holds the essence of both the now and the not yet. It is something that we work to make real in our own lives and in our current world, even though we know this work will not be completed in our lifetime. It is not a destination, but rather a way of being, an attitude, an orientation of the heart. It is found in the way we relate to one another, to every living thing on this planet we share. For us, as Unitarian Universalists, it is a way to bring our Universalism into our everyday lives. Our Universalist theology teaches that love is at the heart of humankind, that each one of us matters, each one of us is flawed and growing in our potential to love ourselves, love one another, and to transform our world.

We experience beloved community whenever and wherever individuals, groups, and institutions choose connection, creativity, and mindfulness over separation, individualism, destruction, and denial. Beloved community rests in the awareness that, with all evidence to the contrary, we belong to one another.

This is hard work. We will make mistakes. We will need to learn how to forgive one another and begin again. King believed that if we could do this, if we could keep trying to bring this love to life, that this may well be the salvation of our civilization. We know it is worth it. No matter how hard the beloved community is to build, it is life-giving work. The Rev. Kate Braestrup, when writing about the difficulty of loving one another into being, says “Keep trying. What else can we do? Keep trying. All loves have much in common, and anyone will offer a useful, if not painless, education in the limitations and possibilities of being human. If you can give your committed love to a person, an idea, or a cause, even if that person, idea, or cause is taken from you, or proven false, you will be better for the experience. The point of being human is to get better and better and better at love.”

May we commit ourselves to this holy love, this building of the beloved community, starting when we say, “We, and each day may we mean one more.”

In faith and love,
Kelly and Roger
COMMUNITY AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

by Janet Swanson, Director of Membership & Adult Programs

Community is, first of all, a quality of the heart. It grows from the spiritual knowledge that we are alive not for ourselves but for one another. Community is the fruit of our capacity to make the interests of others more important than our own. The question, therefore, is not ‘How can we make community?’ but, ‘How can we develop and nurture giving hearts?’

—Henri Nouwen

Creating intentional community takes great effort, and if done well, will give rise to bonds of shared vision, commitment, and just action in the world. As we come together in relationship, developing and nurturing the giving hearts Nouwen speaks of, we become a steady presence in the world. Spiritual practice is foundational to recognizing the promise and potential of this steady and abiding presence and doing the work of building beloved community.

Spiritual practice enriches our daily life and comes in many forms. Formal and informal practices provide opportunities to be still and restore balance in our bodies and minds. Spiritual practice fosters a strong inner self, promoting resilience and gratitude. It connects us to the larger world and integrates all aspects of our being—the physical, mental, and emotional.

This integration can be life-changing not only for us, but for those around us as well. As Resmaa Menakem writes in My Grandmother’s Hands, “Recent studies and discoveries increasingly point out that we heal primarily in and through the body, not just through the rational brain. We can all create more room and more opportunities for growth in our nervous systems. But we do this primarily through what our bodies experience and do—not through what we think or realize or cognitively figure out. Your body—all of our bodies—are where changing the status quo must begin.”

Through spiritual practice, we can drop into our bodies, slowing down and beginning to help our nervous system regain balance. This allows our minds to concentrate and our bodies to heal. We create greater harmony between our inner self and our outer world, and this harmony has an impact on our relationships, informs our values, and connects us to one another.

This month we invite you to begin or deepen your own spiritual practice. Whether on your own or with one of our practice groups, you can achieve a greater ability to channel compassion, forgiveness, and understanding; to access a place of centeredness and calm during your days, especially in times of challenge.

This is how we can develop and nurture giving hearts. This is the work we each do and the work we do in building the beloved community. By creating a deep sense of aliveness and nurturing our spirits through spiritual practice, we flourish together and change the possibilities that are created when we come together. It changes the way we walk through the world both individually and collectively. We better understand who we are, not only in theory but through practice. This space of deep listening and loving presence sows trust, honesty, and openness. And this is the beginning of building the beloved community.

Our tradition holds up this vision as a light to guide us. Through intentional work, through practice, and with all of us together, it may even be possible.
Nurturing Our Community Life

As we continue to navigate the pandemic and the winter season, we invite you to join us for one of our many virtual offerings throughout the week. Many of these offerings are drop-in meetings and provide a time for fellowship, reflection, intellectual engagement, and community building. Our offerings range from **book groups, social and environmental justice team meetings, adult and youth choirs, Japanese crane meditation, men’s group, youth group, ukulele gatherings, and coffee hour** each Sunday after worship. To learn more about these offerings, check out the News from the Red Floors on our website at [www.fusmadison.org/redfloors](http://www.fusmadison.org/redfloors).

Below are descriptions of our drop-in offerings initiated at the start of the pandemic to keep us connected during this time. Zoom information is available on our homepage at [www.fusmadison.org](http://www.fusmadison.org). You can also dial-in to these conversations if video gatherings present a challenge for you.

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**Guided Meditations**
Join fellow members and friends for guided meditations on Mondays and Wednesdays at 6 pm. Led by Janet Swanson, these 30-minute sessions encourage a spirit of reflection and grounding.

**Pandemic Support Group**
We offer a drop-in gathering for those seeking support and community as we continue to navigate the emotional, physical, and spiritual toll of social distancing during the pandemic. Join Rev. Kelly Crocker and lay ministers Roz Woodward and Cricket Gage on Thursdays at 10 am.

**Knitting Gatherings**
No knitting experience required! Join Rev. Kelly Crocker and other creative members and friends on Thursdays at 12 pm or Fridays at 7 pm for fellowship. Bring a project of any medium to work on.

**Pub Theology**
Join Rev. Roger Bertschausen once a month for engaging conversation and debate around a particular topic of interest to Unitarian Universalists. Bring your favorite beverage and join the spirited and civil conversation. Dates are provided in the Red Floors.

**Virtual Justice Drop-In Hours**
An opportunity for seekers of justice to come together to share information or learn about justice work in our community. Join Tim Cordon on Tuesdays at 10:30 am and 4:30 pm.
CRE TEACHER APPRECIATION
by Leslie Ross, Director of Children’s Religious Education

February marks the month that we would typically have a great evening to look forward to...the Religious Education Appreciation Dinner. Great food, chair massage, libations, and fantastic fellowship characterize this event. Not so this year. Still, we don’t want to lose sight of the generosity of our volunteer teachers and their well-earned appreciation...especially during this year of constant adaptation. Teachers have had to learn Zoom skills they never thought they’d need, adapt lessons that are often heavy on small group activities and craft supplies to virtual formats, and find creative ways to build relationships and engage our kids without the advantage of sitting face to face. I am in awe of how this year’s teams have risen to these challenges! They have kept substance, meaning, and community at the heart of our CRE program. We extend our heart-felt thanks to the following teachers:

- Karen Anderson
- Rachel Bennett
- Amy Bradshaw
- Santhia Brandt
- Tamara Brognano
- Julie Collins
- Jen Conti
- Kelly Crocker
- Adrienne Eberhardy
- Vickie Eiden
- Reenie Euhardy
- Karen Faller
- Terri Felton
- Joy Stieglitz Gottschalk
- Scott Harrington
- Sarah Herrick
- Rachel Howard
- Sandy Johnson
- Sarah Jung
- Ali Maresh
- Brian Miles
- Rudy Moore
- Olivia Mote
- Abigail Musselman
- Dipesh Navsaria
- Tara Peotter
- Jay Ranney
- Leslie Ross
- Susen Schroeder
- Brad Sinner
- Amy Slater
- Melissa Tumbleson
- Lindsay Warren
- Jennifer Wickman
- Jack Williams
- Jane Nelson Worel

We love you all!
Wheel of Life
We are saddened to share the news of the passing of Gwen Harman on January 2. It was a great joy to have Gwen here with us at FUS for so many years. We send our love to Gwen’s family and friends as they mourn this deep loss.

Wartmann Workshop
In October, several FUS members participated in the course “Trans Inclusion in Congregations” taught by Rev. Mykal Slack and Zr. Alex Kapitan of the Transforming Hearts Collective. On February 7, Alex will lead a workshop on how to build on our learnings and level up our practice of radical welcome. This workshop is open to all, whether or not you’ve taken the course. Bring an open heart and mind and get ready to transform our congregational culture into one that is radically welcoming and fully trans-affirming. Sign up and learn more at www.fusmadison.org/wartmann.

Winter Parish Meeting
Please mark your calendar for our next virtual parish meeting on Sunday, February 21, 2021, starting at 11:30 pm via Zoom. Login information can be found on our homepage and FUS calendar. Agenda items will include the introduction of a Congregational Covenant, update from the Ministerial Search Committee, proposed bylaws, and more. Looking forward to seeing you there!

YOU Made Cabaret a Great Success!
More than 100 households/families attended our virtual 2020 FUS Got Talent event in November. Your ticket purchases provided 100 meals to families in need through our partnership with FEED to Go. You donated more than 190 items for our first online-only auction, including many wonderful community gatherings reimagined for this time apart. We had 150 participants for our auction, providing 536 bids and an astounding 90% of donated items SOLD. We raised over $14,000, surpassing our goal of $10,000! THANK YOU to all who supported 2020 Cabaret and the talented FUS artists.

First Friday Film on February 5 @ 6:30 pm
The FUS Sustainability Team invites you to join us as we watch The Ware Lecture from the 2020 General Assembly, “Why We’re Ready for Radical Change?” presented by Naomi Klein. You can watch this lecture whenever you wish, but many of us will be viewing it at the usual First Friday Film time of 6:30 pm. Join us at 7:35 pm for an after-film discussion via Zoom led by the FUS Sustainability Team, 350-Madison, and the Youth Climate Action Team. See our website for links.

Friends of the Meeting House
Yes, we’re still around! Friends of the Meeting House is the FUS-affiliated organization tasked with serving as the voice for preservation of our buildings, especially our National Historic Landmark, our Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Unitarian Meeting House. During normal years, we offer tours to the several thousand pilgrims, tourists, and tour groups who visit our campus and offer Wright-themed events and other educational programs to FUS members. Normally scheduled tours are offered every Sunday and weekdays between the beginning of May and the end of September. All ticket sales go towards supporting ongoing restoration work. We hope we will be able to return to offering tours once FUS reopens! In the interim, the Friends Board is busy researching the feasibility of obtaining 501(c)(3) status, developing an informational video, and expanding and upgrading the training tools available to our guides and guide trainees. We welcome your membership in the Friends and invite you to consider serving on our Board and training as guides. Contact March Schweitzer (marchschw@gmail.com or 608-231-3941) for more information.
Sunday, February 7
“Radical, Transformational Welcome” with Zr. Alex Kapitan

In today’s political climate, being a Welcoming Congregation requires more than simply opening our doors to LGBTQ people. We are called to the work of transformation: of our selves and our awareness, of our congregation and its culture, and of our wider community and world. In this service guest speaker Zr. Alex Kapitan, a queer and trans UU leader, will preach on what it will take to embody this sort of radical welcome—the kind of welcome that can ultimately transform us all. The FUS Music Staff will explore music celebrating love and community throughout the month.

Sunday, February 14
“Kinds of Love” with Rev. Roger Bertschausen, Interim Minister

The ancient Greeks had as many as twelve different words for love—including more famously eros, agape, and philia. This points to the problem of the one-size-fits-all way we tend to use “love” in English. This Valentine’s Day reflection will be an exploration of the different kinds and seasons of love.

Sunday, February 21
“Chaos or Community” with Rev. Roger Bertschausen, Interim Minister

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. published Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community in 1967. It is a remarkable book by a remarkable person. The question he poses in the title is the question we face yet again in this difficult new year. Where do we go from here?

Sunday, February 28
“A Laboratory for Hope and Dreams” with Rev. Kelly J. Crocker, Minister of Congregational Life

Our congregations have been envisioned as laboratories where we get to practice being human in community, where we can bring our life experiences, our feelings, our hopes, and dreams. It is a great experiment in shared life where we can embrace it all, the messy and the beautiful, and find our way together to lives of meaning and perhaps even transformation.
Dark Testament Verse 8

Hope is a crushed stalk
Between clenched fingers
Hope is a bird's wing
Broken by a stone.
Hope is a word in a tuneless ditty—
A word whispered with the wind,
A dream of forty acres and a mule,
A cabin of one's own and a moment to rest,
A name and place for one's children
And children's children at last . . .
Hope is a song in a weary throat.
Give me a song of hope
And a world where I can sing it.
Give me a song of faith
And a people to believe in it.
Give me a song of kindliness
And a country where I can live it.
Give me a song of hope and love
And a brown girl's heart to hear it.

Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray