

Congregating for Secular People:

Theory and Practice

**containing theory, readings, liturgy, music, and thoughts
concerning living a freethinking life in community**



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Congregating for Secular People

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About the Author

I bow to no priests either of faith or of unfaith.
I claim as against all sorts of people, simply perfect freedom of thought.

~ Frederick Douglass

. . . it is important that awake people be awake,
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
the signals we give--yes or no, or maybe--
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.

~William Stafford



Introduction

One Sunday morning in 1926, John Dietrich, my predecessor as Senior Minister at First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis, said this:

We call them Humanists because they seek truth to the end that human life may be enriched; and we call them Agnostics because they recognize a realm in which exact knowledge is impossible and they refuse to fill this realm with unverified and unverifiable speculations.

Humanists, religious naturalists, and other freethinkers tend to be inquisitive, joyful, and iconoclastic. We have realized that this world and our time in it is short—at least in the case of our present physicality and consciousness. This is both liberating and focusing.

First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis has practiced congregational humanism for more than a century. Here, I will share some of the learning from that practice.

Focus and liberation are the intention of these writings for assemblies of freethinkers.

A Theory of Mind

An ideal free thinking community accepts that free thought is necessarily dynamic. This dynamism requires flexibility and pragmatism. After all, naturalistic thinkers are committed to updating ideas according to new understandings. The theory of natural selection, for example, continues to change and grow more complex. Brain science; biology; anthropology; cosmology; physics . . . you name a human way of learning, and we are committed to adapt to its findings.

A free thinking community is dynamic.

As I write this, theories of the mind are changing rapidly. We are discovering that what we call our "minds" are much more than the old scientific model of a brain in a glass jar. You know, as in "They Saved Hitler's Brain!"

Dr. Dan Siegel, a professor of psychiatry at UCLA School of Medicine, has worked with physicians, neuroscientists, sociologists, anthropologists, and mathematicians to update our understanding of "mind." Dr. Siegel writes,

Your thoughts, feelings, memories, attention, what you experience in this subjective world is part of mind.

See the implications?

Your thoughts, feelings, memories, attention, what you experience in this subjective world is part of mind.

Right now, your mind extends several feet around you; if other sentient beings are near, your mind is interacting with other minds. What your mind is telling you, right now, is partially about what you are focusing on . . . You are right now what you are focusing on, but your mind is also how you are feeling at the moment. What you're thinking at the moment, yes, but also your mind is your many memories. Your mind is creating a subjective reality. The mind next to you necessarily is *not* thinking what you're thinking.

Dr. Siegel's definition of "mind" goes like this:

the emergent self-organizing process, both embodied and relational, that regulates energy and information flow within and among us.

That's difficult to catch:

Emergent.

A self-organizing process.

Embodied.

Relational.

Your mind "...regulates energy and information flow within and among us."

That's a long way from that brain-in-a-jar picture of the mind from the twentieth century. You can save Hitler's brain if you wish, but you can't capture Hitler's mind.

Yes, we free thinkers are committed to updating our thinking. Our minds are just not what they used to be. They are an

emergent self-organizing process, both embodied and relational, that regulates energy and information flow within and among us.

Relationally.

That's why we "congregate."

What's The Glue?

For those attempting to facilitate a gathering of freethinkers, here are some good questions to ask:

What might hold this community together: What's the glue?

How may we best practice humanity and justice together?

Where might such a gathering go?

Some Points:

All attempts to bring people together—to get people talking—are noble attempts. The outcome may be failure, but the attempt—that is noble.

Reflect: what is achieved by a limited “us”? A bit, perhaps. Maybe. But what might be achieved with the walls knocked down?

Ideally, a humanist gathering will:

1. Respect the autonomy of each and all.
2. Center the margins and let suffering speak.
3. Encourage all to listen, share, and learn.
4. Offer space and time for lamentation and joy.
5. Encourage integrity
6. Explore and underscore human capabilities.
7. Encourage deep thought and reason.
6. Create purpose and meaning through relationships.
7. Promote justice and peace.
8. Promote the flourishing of living things and the planet.

To implement a congregation of free thinkers, here's your mantra:

- The concept is flexible
- The concept is pragmatic

- The concept is love in action
- The concept is justice in action
- The concept is community in action

Surfing the Contradictions—Lived Religion

I define “religion” this way: “Religion is a set of shared practices and ethical commitments grounded in a worldview.” There are other definitions. But the following will be about ethical commitments within the worldview of free thinkers, humanists . . . there are many names for who we are.

Like it our not, you’re living your religion all the time. Like . . . morning breath . . . everybody’s got it. Or at least that’s the way sociologists of religion have traditionally framed our lives. You can choose “Roman Catholic;” you can choose “Secular” or “None of the Above,” but there’s a list, and you fit in it somewhere.

You exist. What you do is your . . . life? religion? philosophy? All of the above! Call it what we will, we’ve all got one. So. What’s yours?

More and more people are feeling cornered by the question.

I contend that the idea of religion—which appears to be as old as *Homo Sapiens* itself – springs from the mismatch between the *Sapien* psyche and how we find our lives to be going. We feel What, exactly?

We want What, exactly?

I think that we – all human beings of whatever stripe—desperately wish to feel at home in the universe and to feel that we have agency and direction in our lives.

Always have. Always will.

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger called that restless, uncomfortable feeling that we each have deep inside *Geworfenheit*, “thrownness.” It’s the feeling that we’re *here*, but we don’t really know where “here” is and we don’t know what to do next. That feeling can be debilitating. Or we can thrill in the expectation of what’s next. That, as Shakespeare said, is the question.

What do we do about finding ourselves thrown into this world? Oh, look: look at all of those beautiful, pre-packaged options! Buddhism. Islam. Lutheranism. Church of God in Christ. For some of us, our ancestors chose for us. For some of us, our culture chose for us.

Some of us are . . . skeptical . . .

Maybe. Just perhaps, reality is so complex that there is no right answer anyway.

The medieval Christian theologian Anselm (1033-1109) had a motto – *fides quaerens intellectum*. In English, “faith seeking understanding.”

Anselm’s motto is I think a concise summary of what theology is about. Theology starts in faith (or unfaith) and attempts to explain how that faith tradition works, without bursting the faith bubble. But that’s “theology,” not how to live your worldview, your religion.

I suspect that the moment faith seeks understanding, the faith ship has sailed . . . and started sinking.

Un-faith–unbelief–is at first an emotional, not a rational, position.

It’s not that faith can’t withstand questioning. Nor is it that faith cannot be understood. It’s merely that faith and understanding do not reside in the same zip code. You can live in faith-land or in theology-land, but between the two there is a great gulf fixed.

I suspect that for the most part, people don’t “do” theology to find logic and coherence in their beliefs. If the wide variety of disparate and contradictory beliefs held by many people is any indication, people look to theology not to solidify existing beliefs, but to find alternatives to weave into their lived practice for a little relief from that *Geworfenheit*. That “thrown” feeling.

The best book that I know of on this subject is *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* by the sociologist of religion Meredith B. McGuire.

In her studies, Dr. McGuire dug deeper than the easy labels of Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Agnostic, Muslim, and on. What do people *actually* do to cope with this big, overwhelming *Geworfenheit*?

A Protestant who never attends church, does Buddhist-style meditation, practices yoga, and carries an amulet to ward off cancer?

Contradictory much? You bet.

But, why not?

McGuire bases her thinking on the work of Clifford Geertz and Robert Orsi who asked, why do we do religion? Their answers:

To make the invisible visible.

To concretize the order of the universe.

To explore the nature of human life and its destiny.

To make human interiority visible and tangible (*Lived Religion*, 13)

That's a darn good summary, I think. Making the "invisible visible" might be about the supernatural, but it might also be about gravity and quarks.

Concretizing "the order of the universe" might be about that old children's song "He's got the whole world in His hand," but it can also be about fractals and the accelerating expansion of the universe.

"To explore the nature of human life and its destiny" may be about salvation and damnation, or it might be about saving ourselves from global climate change.

"To make human interiority visible and tangible" might be about holy rolling and testifying, but it also might be about finding coping skills for taking life's left hooks.

You get my point. Pre-packaged religions just aren't up to *Geworfenheit*. More and more people are choosing . . . *meh* and . . . *whatever*.

These are some of the people who may find meaning in gathering as humanists and freethinkers.

A Short Summary of What Ritual Is

First, ritual creates an inside and outside—a gathering with intention and focus.

The mere fact of showing up at a particular place at a particular time creates an inside and an outside. An “us” and an “us here together.”

Second, ritual is repetition in bounded space. The “here” plus repetition of what we have done before.

The word “liturgy” derives from Greek, λειτουργία—*leitourgia*, meaning “work of the people.” Liturgy is the container for the work we have gathered to do.

Ritual.

For some on Sunday, there is the ritual of making a hot caffeinated beverage, the partaking of carbohydrates, and the sacred reading of *The New York Times*.

Religion, Religious, Ideal Ends

In his classic work *A Common Faith* (1934), the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey distinguishes between *religion* and *religious*.

Religion, according to Dewey, is the traditions, creeds, and dogmas that we regularly related to that word. You know—Christianity, Islam, that sort of thing.

Religious, on the other hand, is about how we *connect*. “Religious” is about having ideals and seeking to live up to them and according to them. (I think there’s a good argument that Dewey’s idea of “religious” became the currently popular “spirituality” of our day.)

Here’s some religion for you: In the *Gospel According to John*, Jesus is reported to have said,

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (14:6, New International Version)

That verse has been used as a cudgel, with many insisting this means that Christianity—and a particular flavor of Christianity at that—is the only way. That’s religion, with a capital R.

But what if we put a bit of *religious* spin on that saying: “I am a way and a truth and a life; I am *one way* to to connect and feel whole.”

Or perhaps: “There are many ways; many truths; and many lives; many ways to connect and feel whole.”

OK, that’s not so good as a way to sell a particular religion, but a good way to point out the complexity of being religious.

Notice what John Dewey is doing. He published his book the year after publication of the *First Humanist Manifesto*, which he signed. That document had outlined a move from a vertical form of religion—human-to-god—to a horizontal form of being religious—human-to-human, human-to-living things, and human-to-planet.

The word "god," in Dewey's account, would no longer conjure visions of a monarchical judge or any sort of deity but, in Dewey's words, "god" would refer to "the unity of all ideal ends arousing us to desire and action." (p. 42)

"The unity of all ideal ends." Hmmmm. "Arousing us to desire and action."

Frankly, I disagree with Dewey on one point. I don't think the word "god" is particularly useful in discussions of how to act ethically and morally in the world. The term simply refers to too many various and sundry ideas; conjures too many disparate images; and is ultimately either hopelessly subjective or smothered in a morass of tradition.

But "the unity of all ideal ends" is not a bad thing to strive for, provided that "ideal ends" are positive for those human-to-human, human-to-living things, and human-to-planet relationships.

And getting aroused to desire and action . . . yes, as Rev. Howard Thurman said, the world needs people who have come alive.

(To be clear about this: "ideal" doesn't necessarily mean "ethical." A white nationalist's ideal might be an all-white United States. That's a negative ideal. But that all people have a shot at liberty and well-being . . . positive and ethical ideal.)

You get the point.

Differentiating between "religion" and "religious" rather than "religion" and "spiritual" adds a dimension to the ideas.

It's something to think about.

Committing to Community

When I think of community, I think of the little one-room church about two miles from my family farm in the southern part of Illinois. That community took my father in during the 1930s. It's a small church in the middle of nowhere. It was about a mile from where my father's family lived at that time, in a two-room sharecroppers shack.

My dad was very up front about why he first became a Christian and joined that church: they had a potluck meal on Sundays after the service.

In those days, rural people still predominantly used horses and wagons for transportation, and consequently it took people a while to get home after church. So, people contributed what they could for a meal before the journey back to their farms.

My teen-aged father figured out that if he attended service, he could eat—something that was not a surety back at his parents' shack.

Thus, my father became a Christian. Soon, the church hired him as the custodian, which meant cleaning up a bit, and getting to the building early to build a wood fire in the pot-bellied stove on winter Sundays.

When my father went to war, the congregation put a photograph of him in the pew where he sat and kept it there until he returned.

Five years later, my mother and father were married there.

I attended services there sometimes as a kid. I went to revivals there. I remember, for example, a revival preacher who claimed he had grown up as a cannibal but had "found Jesus" and become a preacher. He really did have filed, pointy teeth.

The little church is between my family farm and the small town where my parents later went to church. And, when my father died, I drove by there with my mother and paid my respects to the building. When my mother died, I drove by again, to pay respects.

A couple of my kids now live on the family farm and they sometimes get lost out on the winding gravel roads that don't have any markers or signs. When they call, I always ask first if they've passed that church and which side of the car it was on.

And, anytime I get back to the farm, I stop by that church, because it is for me the essence of what a religious community can be—it nourishes; it teaches; it celebrates; it mourns; it remembers; and it is an anchor across the generations.

That is what religious community does well.

Religion Privatized

Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation set in motion a wave that would eventually privatize much of the European Protestant religious experience—the depth and intensity of the individual experience often becomes more important than the communal.

In the United States, as the prevalence of “Cafeteria Catholics” attests, even Roman Catholicism has fallen into the chipper of individualism. The acid of Martin Luther’s Protestantism has by now melted what American fundamentalists once called “Romanism, ritualism, and rationalism.”

So, here we are . . .

The conservative side of Christian religious thought is overt in this subjective turn: “Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as your lord and savior?”

The liberal wing, from New Age to “spiritual but not religious” to atheism, is pure individualism at play—the goal is to “find myself” or to “be true” to myself.

Our souls (and/or minds) are completely our own, by gosh and by golly.

Consequently, in the United States today, seventy-percent of Americans *label* themselves Christian, but only seventeen percent attend church at least once a month.

Not much commitment! Aside from a commitment to self.

Congregational Humanism is here to counter this trend.

Congregating Congregation-ally and Committing to Commitment

You've probably read that being religious is good for your health. It isn't the *specific beliefs* that are good for you but the fact that you're doing something "religiously:" getting out of bed, brushing your teeth, and going somewhere, meeting people, co-operating with people, getting irritated by people; talking, sharing, learning.

It isn't religion that's good for you; it's congregating that is good for you.

Why?

Besides the fact of making it somewhere on time being good for you, congregational communities can also help us cope. If you get a scary medical diagnosis, I can virtually guarantee you that someone—or several someones—in a group of twenty or thirty people have also faced that diagnosis. Any life challenge you face, you can pretty well bet someone has also faced that difficulty. Congregations offer coping skills and social support. They make the utterly unthinkable into something imaginable.

I'm not attempting to set myself up as an authority. Rather, I hope in these pages to outline some things I've learned about congregating over time.

I'm Senior Minister at First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis. Each week in my words of welcome I mention to the long-term members and visitors that First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis (FUS) is the birthplace of congregational Humanism. What I mean by that is the insight in 1916 experienced by the newly-called minister, John Dietrich, and the people in the congregation. That insight is that religious community doesn't have to adhere to strict creeds or specific beliefs. As a matter of fact, we don't refer to religion at all.

What we have been doing at FUS for more than a century is truly counter-cultural. We have tried to live up to a quote from the great liberator Frederick Douglass: "I bow to no priests either of faith or of unfaith. I claim as against all sorts of people, simply perfect freedom of thought."

Gathering the Spirit, Gathering the Minds

People gather into groups for companionship; for an experience (positive, we hope) and to experience an ennobling sense of purpose.

The challenge in building such a collective project is creating the “din of conversation,” a brave space to share dangerous ideas. This is a space where people converse rather than pontificate (a counter-cultural activity for sure!); and a space that insists upon the “inherent worth and dignity of every person.”

That’s why at First Unitarian Society we stand up each week and repeat a short but punchy congregational covenant:

*This is our great covenant:
to dwell together in peace;
to seek the truth in love;
and to help one another.*

(Adapted from Rev. James Vila Blake.)

An ideal congregation (as ideal as real human beings get) of people is a dynamic intergenerational community that offers opportunities for celebration, creative renewal, relationship, and mutual support. Such a space is magical. And we seek to do it without imposing either “faith or unfaith.” We seek to achieve “perfect freedom of thought.”

No, there’s never a gathering of people in which everything is ideal or goes according to plan.

Having lived a long time, I now realize that here’s the thing about living a life: there needs to be a dream that can remain a dream. Each of us needs ideals.

Getting rich isn’t an adequate dream or ideal because no one ever seems to get rich enough. Getting famous isn’t adequate because nobody ever feels famous enough. A fancy new car will never do it because no car stays new and seldom feels all that fancy after a few months and some new ones have appeared that are even fancier.

A dream that can remain a dream. Ideals that are ideal.

Here's the thing: there's plenty of facts and figures and information out there. You can find that all by yourself. It flows over us like a spring downpour

In addition, most of us have plenty of options—but how do we find that dream, that direction that feels worthy of living? And, after we find a sustaining dream and direction, how do we keep going in that direction?

Congregations of people can aid in that journey.

It's Not Even Possible, But . . .

If you look it up in textbooks, what you're going to quickly discover is that building a congregational space of freethinkers can't be done.

Time-worn and cliched wisdom says that a group of people who don't agree on some very basic things about how reality works can't be in community. It's not possible to have Douglass' "simply perfect freedom of thought." You've got to have, as Douglass called it, a "priest of faith" or a priest of "unfaith."

Yet there are such places. As senior minister at First Unitarian Society, I'm not a priest of faith or unfaith. I'm just there to help people consider the options.

Some of the gathered congregation perceives reality as numbers; some through the scientific method; others through art and aesthetics. But still people can gather, because we believe that personal, subjective beliefs can be put aside for a greater good.

The core value of Humanism is that people matter more than ideas.

This is not what most people think. But it's a core Humanist value. What we think we believe is so contingent. So balanced on a knife's edge—where you're from; who your family is; what gender you've been assigned . . . all the arbitrary labels that get heaped on each and every one of us.

Humanism says that those are indeed arbitrary. If anything is sacred, then life itself is the most sacred thing.

We must hold to that truth because the universe we exist in *does not hold life sacred*. Far from it. (Ask all the rabbits and squirrels and deer and foxes and people who froze to death last winter how much nature cares.) Our empathy; our compassion; our caring is all the kindness that there is on this planet.

That's what has kept FUS together since 1881—a community that nourishes; teaches; celebrates; mourns; remembers: it is an anchor across the generations.

Such gatherings are possible. I believe it is a noble task to build them.

1. CALLS TO ASSEMBLY



Call to Assembly: A Welcome

Wherever you come from,
however you got here,
whatever you look like,
whatever you believe,

whether you have a
bank account or not,
however you are propelled
around this building,

you are welcome here.

All are welcome
as we strive to live
in integrity and justice—

in what the First Humanist
Manifesto called “a shared life
in a shared world.”

Join in and share.

Welcome: The Sacred Is

Welcome, all, to this place of love and justice.
This place where we attempt to live up to
humanity's highest ideals, highest hopes.

Do we fail?

Yes we do. Often.

Do we try again?

Yes we do, always.

Because we are people
looking out for
each other,
all others,
and the planet.

Welcome, all, to this place
of love and justice.

To this gathering where
the sacred and the holy

are our being together.

Opening Words: A Theology of Welcome

Let's *be* the welcome
we crave—
open hearts,
arms outstretched.

Let's embody
radical welcome,
unquestioning love.

Let's *be* the welcome
we crave—
deeply hearing
voices and hearts.

Let's *be* the welcome
we crave—
enriching,
understanding.

Let us embody
the community
we crave.

A Call to Assembly: Renewing Faith

We ask "what's the point?"
to renew our faith,
to renew our trust

that our world is enough,
that we are enough.

We ask "what's the point?"
to remind ourselves

that loving our world
and each other is our way.

We ask "what's the point?"
to renew our faith that
loving choices create

a loving life.

Opening Words: Into the Circle

We gather into this circle.

We gather into this circle of care

to dream,

to envision,

to embody and achieve

the compassion we dream,

the justice we envision,

the dignity of each

in an ever-growing, ever-

flowing circle of love and justice.

Opening Words: "Earth and All"

We join together,
bringing both our
shadow and our light.

We join together,
opening our minds
and our hearts.

We join together,
embracing,
celebrating,
sharing

the beauty of each,
the beauty of self,
the beauty of the earth,
the beauty of all.

A Call to Assembly: Courage Is

We gather together here, now,
summoning our courage to be.
We gather, bringing our
weariness and our energy.
We gather, bringing our
wariness and our visions.

Like trees in rocky places,
our roots clutch. What
we find is each other.
What we find is each
other, holding tightly.

Courage is not certitude.
Courage is not assurance.
Courage is the willingness
to join in the attempt.
To join in the unlikely,
even the impossible.

Courage is a choice.
Courage is a way of knowing.
Courage is a way of joining together.

Courage is knowing that
together, we will do what
none of us can do alone.

Opening Words: For the Grace of Now

The grace of now is sufficient, for
weakness teaches us strength;

illness heals the spirit; wounds
create an unscarred mind.

May I rejoice as best I can
in life's many difficulties,
little or large. May I rejoice.

For weakness teaches strength.
For the grace of now is sufficient.

(based on 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 KJV)

Opening Words: a New Story

Welcome to a new story!
Welcome to a day unwritten.
We gather to speak of possibility.

We remember the losses,
we celebrate the victories.
As a people of story,

we embrace the possible
over the probable,
weaving a story of hope.

Join us in the new story.
Join us in the day unwritten.
Join us in the future of possibility.

Call to Assembly: Giving Voice

Our ancestors speak to us and through us.
The soil and sky speak to us and through us.

The other animals speak to us and through us.
The plants and trees speak to us and through us.

All that is speaks to us and through us.
We are all a part of all that is.

Call to Assembly: An Invocation for Peace

We gather here, dedicated to peace and justice.

May the gentle dawn of acceptance and love
shine more vividly than blood and fire.

May our work of love and justice,
moving on its steady path,
quell the screams of hate.

May violence quicken our resolve for peace and love.

May calming waters drown consuming fire;
may the dove's flight be more
stunning than the eagle's.

May the gentle deeds of the peaceful
overshadow shouting and gunfire.

May our work of understanding and love shine
brighter than the hate on our instantaneous screens.

We, gathered here
in solidarity and hope,

may we be
peace.

Call to Assembly: Here for Each Other

We are here not for either / or.
We are here not for musts or shoulds.

We are here for both / and
and for the peace. We're here

for the faces. For the hands.
We're here for each other.

Call to Assembly: Abundance

Today we gather to celebrate abundance.
Today we gather to celebrate being enough—
enough as each one of us;
enough as a gathered community.
Today we gather like flowing water.

There are times to be ice.
There are times to be steam.
There are times to flow freely.

As the *Daodejing* says:

The highest good is like water.
Water benefits all things without argument.
It flows into the lowest places
and so shows the way
of the creative universe. (Chapter 8).

Today we gather like water.
Today we gather to celebrate being enough.
Today we gather to celebrate abundance.

Call to Assembly: Us. Here. Litany (to be read antiphonally)

Here I am,
my sibling.
Here I am.

Can you
hear me?
Here I am.

Saying you . . .
You. Here.
Now. We.

We are.
Here. Us.
Together.

Can you.
Hear me
here? I am

calling to you.
Calling to
us. You. Me.

Us together.
Here I am.
Calling. Let's

all say "yes."
Let's. Here.
Now. Together.

All say . . .
Yes!

2. CHALICE LIGHTINGS



Chalice Lighting: Gratitude

Some moments only grace
can get us through. A touch.
A glance. A word. Time.

Other moments a call comes
and the news is not disaster.
That moment is gratitude.

We light this chalice in gratitude.
Gratitude for grace.
Gratitude for gratitude.

Chalice lighting: Story

We tender this flame, opening the book,
turning to a page yet to be written.
Opening a story yet to be told.

May we fill this fresh page wisely.
May we write a new story into being.
May we together inscribe the page with hope.

Chalice Lighting: Wonder

We light this flame,
reminding ourselves
to treasure the magic
in the mundane,

the wonders of
carbon dioxide,
oxygen, nitrogen,
rapid oxidation

into light, heat, and
the dance of a flame.
We light this chalice,
kindling, remembering

our innate sense
of wonder at
the very real magic
of our world.

Chalice Lighting: Embracing Responsibility

We light this flame
reminding ourselves
that we are both
the light and the fire;
both warmth and darkness.

Reminding ourselves
that we are both
destroyer and sustainer.

We light this flame
embracing our responsibility
to the earth and to each other.

Chalice Lighting: Justice, Meaning, and Purpose

We light this chalice
remembering and honoring our own tradition
and celebrating the rich diversity of traditions among us.
As we search for justice, meaning, and purpose,
may we remember that justice, meaning, and purpose
live first in deeply listening to one another.

(This chalice lighting was written for a multifaith gathering.)

Chalice Lighting: Expectation

We kindle this flame in expectation.
Not the expectation that justice will soon prevail.
Not the expectation that the struggle will soon be won.

Yet in the expectation that companionship and joy
will be ours on journey.
We kindle this flame in community and expectation.

Chalice Lighting: We Unite In Our Differences

We unite in our differences in background and belief;
We unite—with gratitude and hope:
Hope for a world of differences;
Hope for a world that honors difference;
We unite in community
With gratitude for difference.

Chalice Lighting: Better Together

We light this flame.
The hope ignited is
the hope in our gathering

together.

We gather in this place.
We gather in this tradition.
We gather to ignite hope,

here, now, together.

Chalice Lighting: In This Time of Loss

In this time of loss
In this time of asking why
We light a flame of sharing
We light a flame of commitment.
In this time of why
We light this flame
Sign of our searching
Sign of our sharing
Sign that together we remember
Together we ask why
Together in sadness and joy
We share light.
Together we celebrate
What we are together.

Chalice Lighting: Hymn to the Light

Our light is the light of the sun,
keeper of all we love.

Our light is the light of the earth,
provider of sustenance.

Our light is the light of all living things,
life precious like our own.

Our light is the light of each of us,
bound together in need and hope.

Our light is the light of the cosmos,
keeper of all we have known

and all we will ever know.

3. READINGS AND MEDITATIONS



Litany for a Multifaith Gathering

(One:) We gather, acknowledging our sacred call to love our neighbors as ourselves.

(All:) We gather together in beloved community.

(One:) We gather in our human frailty, acknowledging our failure to love enough.

(All:) *We gather together in beloved community.*

(One:) We gather, remembering the prisoner, the homeless, the hungry.

(All:) *We gather together in beloved community.*

(One:) We gather, proclaiming that all must be free of violence and fear.

(All:) *We gather together in beloved community.*

(One:) We gather, proclaiming our dedication to justice.

(All:) *We gather together in beloved community.*

(One:) We gather, proclaiming our dedication to walk in the ways of mercy.

(All:) *We gather together in beloved community.*

(One:) We gather, proclaiming our dedication to walk in the ways of truth.

(All:) *We gather together in beloved community.*

(One:) We gather together in beloved community.

(All:) *May it ever be so!*

Belonging Here

When it feels like lament
is the only sound and need
the only way of being,

here is that one warm
room where you know
you belong, you know is

waiting, open, ready.
Here is that place you
remember where you

are remembered in this
too cold world. This place
calls now, softly: Come

into the circle where you
know that you belong.

Heritage Us

One:

It is not the date
you passed over
the water or land
to reach here. You
or kin long gone.

Many:

It is not the time,
or the way you
arrived that makes
a citizen, a neighbor.

One:

In the rich weave of a nation,
ancestors will dance in the fabric,
the songs they sang echoing on.

Many:

From the wisdom and folly of elders,
traditions persist, for good and ill,
a shared story when told in truths . . .

One:

the truth that we are woven
together, aware through traditions,
the whispers in ancient oaks,
the laughter of the young together.

Many:

Our heritage calls,
echoing voices,
urging love,
summoning joy.

One:

In all our veins flows

the one blood of history.
Promises broken,
injustices done.

Many:
Forgive the past,
as best we can know it,
the true and real—

the real--a heartbeat,
a sob, love, longing,
a vision beyond time's horizon,

roots deep,
branches reaching.

One:
Treasure the heritage,
for heritage is a treasure,
binding us together,
united in the quest
to free each other

Gratitude for Food

We pause a moment
in the joy of this time
to call to mind gratitude
and thanks for this bounty.

We remember those
who grew our food.

We think of those
who have prepared
and brought us food.

We bring to mind
the forms of life
and the planet that
we all depend upon.

We give thanks as
we work to insure
that all may enjoy
life's bounty.

So may it be!

Yes, There's No Binary

The road not taken
is not a fork. That's
too simple a thought,
flipping some coin.

Either/or. Nope. It's
not this *or* that.
No *or* yes. It's *nor/*

neither and all
of the above and
more. The road
taken goes every

way at once. There.
There. They. Them.

What is Holy to Humanists?

Late in his life, the philosopher Richard Rorty – a well-known atheist – was asked by an interviewer if he could define holy. Perhaps the interlocutor thought the aging and dying Rorty would be stumped by the question or would fall into some traditional language of reverence. But Rorty was not stumped by the question. He responded, “Holy: the hope that someday my remote descendants will live in a global civilization in which love is pretty much the only law.”

For a Humanist, holy doesn't have to do with particular places, words, or books – or even particular ideas, which must always be under interrogation. Holy is a place where and when the basics of human flourishing are realized. Among these basics are the inherent worth and dignity of every person; a world community that stops the battling between clans, tribes, and nations; and respect for the planet and its creatures.

For the Solstices

1. Longest Light

Earth. Air. Fire. Water.

Longest day, shortest night.

Goodbye to spring, gone.

Spring too short. Spring too long.

Spring of contradictions.

Water. Fire. Air. Earth.

Spring gone to Solstice.

Night gone to light.

To the heat of summer,

hope of summer. Solstice.

Longest day. Day of light.

Elemental day,

hear our hope,

longest day:

Earth. Air. Fire. Water.

We tend the fires of summer.

May we tend the fires of winter.

2: Longest Night

Earth. Air. Fire. Water.

Shortest day, longest night.

Goodbye to autumn, gone.

Autumn too short. Autumn too long.

Autumn of contradictions.

Water. Fire. Air. Earth.

Autumn gone to Solstice.

Light gone to night.

To the cold of winter,

slumber of summer. Solstice.
Shortest day. Day of night.

Elemental day,
hear our hope,
shortest day:
Earth. Air. Fire. Water.

We tend the fires of winter.
May we tend the summer fires.

Dr. John Dietrich, founder of congregational humanism:

It does not frighten me to know that the universe has made me a part of its teeming, abundant life; that the same power that is breaking the lilacs into leaf is breaking me into a fuller flower of personality I am content to be a brother to the leaves, the flowers, the trees, and all the strange and beautiful world in which I dwell It does not sadden me to realize that for a little while the cosmic urge voices itself in this strange community of busy particles which I call myself. In me, in you, the Universe has spoken.

"On Life's Renewal," an Easter address (#957)

Not Knowing: Let's Join In

Let's all join in
the thought that we
do not know. Let's

join in the fact
of not knowing.

Let's all join in,
embracing mystery—
that's the place

to join together.
That place is here.

That place of not
knowing. There is
the place to

gather and hold
each other always.

All and All

What is it the sky is saying?
What is it, the branch?
What does the spider's weave tell?
What does the grass have to say?
What does the water whisper?
What the stone and the earth?
What is it everything is saying if
only we hear the breath?

It is all that is speaking.
It is everything that is,
one and one alone.
It is the all speaking when
each whispers, stutters, shouts.

What is it? What
is it the sky is saying?
You.
You have heard.
Remember, now.

A Lament Based on the Psalms

Injustice never ends and
so we too often cry in despair,
"There is no end of injustice!"

Yet, together, we care for each other;
we lift each other up. We listen,
even as we stand outnumbered.

In our struggle for justice
we find meaning; in our
struggle we find purpose.

Chalice Lighting: Grief and Joy

We light a flame
in hopes of warmth,

knowing that cold
will come again.

We celebrate life;
we mourn death.

We wish for joy;
we fear grief.

In our ideal world,
these are separate,
like day and night.

Yet, here,
in this world,
our real world,
night and day,
joy and grief
weave daily
in our lives.

We light this flame
celebrating life
with clear eyes
for what it is.

A Lament
(antiphonal reading)

We cry out in grief at
the suffering we see—
 people, all living things, the planet.
 Preventable suffering, yet
 it continues, on and on.

When we feel overwhelmed,
 we gather to find a path,
 to find new ways forward.

When we feel overwhelmed,
 we know that to our right
 and to our left are
 the faces of caring,
 faces of companionship.

Joining together,
 we find our refuge.
 We find our strength.
We find our wisdom.
 We find our way forward.

A Lament Based on the Psalms

How long will most be forgotten? forever?
How long shall justice lie hidden? forever?

How long will we look inside and find only sorrow?
How long will the worst take precedence?

People who love this earth, join
together in the days we have left,
so that the oppressors no longer
rejoice at the tears of the oppressed.

Still, I believe; I believe the good will join together.
I despair at the injustice that humanity endures.
I rejoice in the beauty that humanity has wrought.

May we! May we rise to our best selves.

A Lament Based on Psalm 28

My people are my rock.
Because they hear me,
they pull me from the pit

We listen to each other.
We join in peace.
We join in understanding.
We join in justice.
We fear no mischief in
each other's hearts.

We join together,
listening to each other,
listening to the earth.

A Lament Based on Psalm 56

Of human wrangling
there is no end.
Endless struggles engulf us.

Where do we find hope?

There is trust in words
that have been spoken.

Despite all the words
that have been hurled,
we can find meaning,
talking with each other.

We weep until the pillow is soaked.
The air swallows all our tears.
Our solace is our words to each other.

We trust in our striving.
We trust in each other.
We join in striving;
we join in the march.

Lament (Based on Psalms 6)

Regret is thin gruel.
In our weakness,
in our anxiety at the times,
we find strength in each other.

May we remember the prophets,
their words and their deeds.
May we rise again in hope
as we dry each other's tears.

We hear the calls of our companions;
we hear the call of justice.
we join together to realize tomorrow.

Chant and Sing the Real
(can be read antiphonally by verse)

Go ahead—you know you want to sing a song of the earth to a new tune!
Go on—you know a chant can fill the void.

The imagination is more real than real, the song sang deep is all singing.
A holy sort of play, firmly embraced, is serious, serious, and free.

Sing on then, piercing the droning commonplace.
Sing on, knowing your notes are new and needed.

Listen: find your firm, sure voice. You hear it sometimes. Grasp it and fling it again!

Chant away the machinations of merely being;
join the struggle with the real, each moment a leap over some abyss,

each moment eternity.

Chant the unique and holy.
Enchant the disenchanting.
Sing until only in-cantation is real.
Sing deeply. Sing all song.

For Change

For the setting sun from an airplane window.
For the rising sun from a train window after riding all night.
For the rising sun and setting sun in directions that feel foreign.
For the sunlight even when we are lost.

For the times the heart has longed to be alone.
For the times the heart has ached for another.
For leaving in fear.
For leaving in hope.
For the way home.
For the way away.

For the windows and the suns we have seen.
For the windows and the suns we *will* see.

For memory and forgetting.
For the change that is our lives.

Why Humanists Don't Worship

The very act of worship creates idols and fetishes.
Creates separateness and entitlement.
Creates hierarchy. Others "the other."

The cosmos is a large and amazing place;
human consciousness is an amazing experience.
Our awe, wonder, and gratitude flow from our experience of this immensity.

Still, we must remember that emotions are human;
we must remember that the universe does not exist on a human scale nor for human purposes,
nor is our experience of consciousness more than a material experience, part of the fabric of the cosmos itself.

We do well to remind ourselves that each of us is a result of the cosmos,
of all that is.

When we attempt to remove ourselves from our wholeness,
artificially creating objects for veneration,
we perpetrate the illusion that human beings are unique or special.

This perception of separateness has created many of the problems humanity suffers from, and has created suffering for the planet and its living things.

Therefore, humanists do not "worship."

The Cosmos Doesn't

The cosmos doesn't
give credit. It's pay-as-
you-go and go as you
pay, like any one-off
mom and pop operation—
cash, thank you much.

The cosmos doesn't
cut deals—foxholes,
roadside, bedside—the
deals don't come, only
some luck if you're
lucky, like that last five
bucks into a slot machine.

Sometimes.

The cosmos doesn't
hate you, but like any
border agent, it wants
your things in order and
ready to go. Then it gives
you that stamp, and
you're good to go. Go!

The cosmos doesn't
give up, but you're on
your own, like every other
little thing. It's all about
dealing with the wheeling,
like you and everything
else does. The cosmos . . .

the cosmos is you.
And you and that. And that.
(Which it's impolite to
say.) And on, with no outside.

No outsider. No other.
The cosmos is us.
And how we love.
Or not. The cosmos.

The Liminal

You can't live there
long, in the liminal,
that old word for

that old word
"threshold," that
place for stamping,

stomping, and
being neither
there nor here.

That space for
transforming,
going or coming

from out to in, from
there to here. At
times the only

question is "how
long have I been
away?" "Could it be

that I'm back now?"
And where might
that "here" be?

We're always
between, if we're
thinking. Always

in the liminal
where that's
neither here nor.

Wind and Clover (for Rostam)

No. There are no words
in the face of great loss.
There are no meanings;

no purposes. Great loss
is and only is, like the clover
chilled in a late frost. Like

poetry. Like song. It is
and only is. Yet breathe—
you aren't asked for any—
No words. No meanings.

No purposes. Only being.
Only being here. Embracing.
Like the wind and the clover.

The Containers We Cast
(Religious Studies 102)

Clever potters that we are,
first we cast the jar,
the vase, the box,
then we fill it.
Clever carpenters

that we are,
first we nail the

box, the vase,
the jar, then we
sell it. Clever
glassblowers

that we are,
first we form
the vase, the box,
the jar, then set them
on a shelf—this,
here, can make
everything better—

that's the plan for
the containers we cast.

That's the plan that
never works out.

What We Find Here

We find here days that swirl into days.
We find here nights that drag into nights.

We find pain here and fear.
We find here others in loneliness, fear, and pain.

Which is not to say we do not find here
others who give comfort and even love.

Like a spring storm, lightening can sear the air,
yet rain may fall too, gentle, lulling.

What we find here is the will to find all we can find here,
hugging some, cringing from some,

yet aching, eager always for what we find here.

A New Liturgy
(a story told by the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi)

Once three friends were discussing life. One said:

“Can people live together and know nothing of life,
work together and produce nothing?
Can people fly around in the air
and forget to exist,
forever and ever?”

The three friends looked at each other and burst out laughing.

They had no explanation, and so
they were better friends than before.

Then one of the friends died.

Upon hearing of the death, Confucius sent a disciple
to help the two remaining friends
chant the funeral obsequies.

Upon arrival, the Confucian found that one of the friends had composed a
song,
and the other was playing upon a lute.

The two friends sang:

“Hey, Sung Hu, where’d you go?
Hey, Sung Hu, where’d you go?
You have gone where you really were all along,
And we are here, damn it, we are here!”

When the Confucian heard this
he burst into the room and said,

“May I inquire where you found this
in all the books of funeral obsequies,
this silly singing in the presence

of the dearly departed?"

The two friends looked at each other and burst out laughing. One said,

"Poor fellow! He doesn't know the new liturgy!"

(Adapted from a translation by Thomas Merton)

The Solstices Teach Us

The Solstices teach us
that darkness comes,
that darkness goes.

The Solstices teach us
that light comes,
that light goes.

The Solstices teach us,
calmly, silently, to be
calm, silent. Learning.

The Solstices teach us
as we circle the sun
that everything flies.

The Solstices teach us
to remember the dark,
to remember the light,

to remember time.

The seasons. And love
as we circle the sun.

Equinox

Equinox teaches us
that the light
comes and goes.

Equinox teaches us
as we circle on
that all things fly,

that all things balance,
that everything changes.
Equinox teaches us

to remember the light,
to remember the dark,
to remember time.

The seasons. And love
as we circle the sun.

Seasons

Some see daffodils
with the first day of
spring; some see snow
or other things.

Some see rain,
some see ice.
For some it's a nightmare;
for others, it's nice.

Don't Say: an Antiphonal Reading

One: There's an elephant in the room
and it's large. It's big.

Many: There's an elephant in the room
and it's not hid.

One: There's an elephant in the room
and nobody's going to say.

Many: There's an elephant in the room
and everybody's afraid.

One: There's an elephant in the room
and no comment is welcome.

Many: There's an elephant in the room
and not seeing it is expected.

One: There's an elephant in the room;
you must turn your head.

Many: There's an elephant in the room
and nothing can be said.

One: There's an elephant in the room
and if that's not said,

Many: nothing can be said. Say it:
There's an elephant in the room!

Hope, Nearly Not There

There's no package called hope.
Nothing at a shop to look for. Hope
won't store like hay in a barn. It is a

last leaf on a branch in deep winter.
It is a singular thing, firm when it's
found—a hand reached out. A word

to the marrow. Hope is fine grained,
like lavender gone to seed. Gossamer,
a moth's wings. There's no weight

called hope. It's a hand; a whisper;
a moment shared. Nearly not there.
But, like a shadow, there all the same.

Here for Beloved Community

May I be all in for beloved community.
May I be all in, despite the challenges.
May I be all here for beloved community.

May I be ready for the beauty because
I long for the possibilities. Yes, I am
here for beloved community.

May I see the beauty of
you in community; of
us in community.

May we be the beauty
of beloved community.
May we be the dream together.

We join here for beloved community.

A Meditation on the Words of James Baldwin

The American writer James Baldwin wrote this:

Perhaps the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty of our lives, will imprison ourselves in totems, taboos, crosses, blood sacrifices, steeples, mosques, races, armies, flags, nations, in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have.

Baldwin is outlining the humanist program here: he's naming the negatives, the places fear takes us:

"totems,
taboos,
crosses,
blood sacrifices,
steeples,
mosques,
races,
armies,
flags,
nations . . ."

Baldwin underlines the fact that fear is a very destructive motivator.

When you're fearful, you can't be free.

But here is the humanist answer: There are a good many things about the human condition that are extremely unfortunate—illness; suffering; loss.

But our finitude—the certitude of death—is *not* one of those extremely unfortunate things.

No, it's not fun to die, but the fact of death is not unfortunate.

As the atheist poet Wallace Stevens said, "death is the mother of beauty." Death is also the mother of freedom.

The concept of eternal life erases the need to achieve freedom for yourself, for others, and for the planet. For it is our finitude and our challenges and our losses and our potential losses that make a piquant life.

Piquant—provocative; stimulating; spicy.

James Baldwin defines the center of a humanist worldview—embracing finitude.

Our lives *will* end. But if we allow fear to be our motivator, we will sacrifice our freedom in “order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have.”

4. CLOSING WORDS

(in Christian tradition called benedictions: *bene*, well and *dicere*, saying)



Closing Words: Go in Peace

Go in peace.

Go *be* peace.

Go be the answers
everyone searches for.

Go, relying on the power
of the human spirit.

So may it be!

Closing Words: That Most Difficult Magic

May we practice that
most difficult of magics:

turning words into
works. Turning

good thoughts into
actions for good.

May we work that
most intricate

of spells, together–
conjuring, knowing

that all of this
is all that is.

Knowing
that all of us

is enough.

Closing Words: We Go Now

We go now, out into the world,
embracing our responsibility to our earth;
embracing our responsibility to each other.

We go now—enriched and enlivened—
out into our beautiful, broken world.

Closing Words: Not Knowing

May we rejoice in not knowing.
May we rejoice in the process of not knowing,
in the possibilities of not knowing.

To know that we do not know . . .
May we take that challenge.

May we live bravely into not knowing.
May we live. Not knowing'
celebrating all that is.

Closing Words: May All Those

May those who mourn be comforted.
May all be sheltered in mercy.
May all be clothed by compassion.
May hunger and thirst be quenched in justice.

May all go in peace, rejoicing
in the power of the human spirit.

So may it be!

Closing Words: Go in Knowing

Go out into the world knowing
that freedom is the power
to dominate what dominates you.

Go, be the justice you lack.
Go, be the power you feel.
Go, be the compassion all thirst for.

Go, emboldened by the power of the human spirit.

Go, creating freedom.

So may it be.

Closing Words: Encounter Peace

May all that is bless
and keep you;

may joy and gratitude
shine in you.

Know that you are
a light in the world:

may all who meet you
encounter peace.

(Adapted from Numbers 6:22-26)

Closing Words: Neither Power Nor Politics

Be confident that neither death nor life,
neither power nor politics,

neither things now nor things to come,
neither mystery nor conviction,

nor anything on the earth or in the sky,
will ever separate you from love and compassion.

(adapted from Romans 8:38-39)

Closing Words: Consider the Depth

Consider the depth of the riches
and the wisdom and the knowledge

in human time. Consider the art
and the languages. Consider

how boundless the human imagination
is in this mysterious thing called life—

searching enigmas; finding threats:
discovering laws . . .

May we join in the discovery;
may we work for the good.

May we embody the best
of the human spirit.

So may it be!

(adapted from Romans 11:33, 36)

Closing Words: In Harmony with All

May the grace that is
in endurance and in hope
grant you to live in such

harmony with all, in such
agreement with all, that
together we may, with

one voice, create
grace, endurance and
hope for all that is.

(adapted from Romans 15:5-6)

Closing Words: Unshakable

Therefore, friends, be steadfast,
unshakable, always ready to help

our neighbors, knowing that doing
good for others is never done in vain.

(adapted from 1 Corinthians 15:58)

Closing Words: Love and Peace

Finally, friends, rejoice. Restore connections, affirm one another, walk with one another, even when

you disagree. Live in love and peace and love and peace will be with you.

(adapted from 2 Corinthians 13:11)

Closing Words: In Love and Compassion

May we hear our hearts:
teaching, learning.

May we hear our hearts:
the wisdom; the songs;

the heart's cries for compassion.

May we live in gratitude
for all that is. May all we do
be done in love and compassion.

(adapted from Colossians 3:16-17)

Closing Words: Lightly Upon the Our Earth

May our love only increase.

May our gratitude only increase.

May our love for the world
and compassion for its creatures

only increase as we, in kindness
for ourselves, in kindness for others,
learn to live lightly upon our earth.

(adapted from Thessalonians 3:12-13)

Closing Words: Grace, Mercy, Peace

May grace, mercy,
and peace be with us
as we work for grace,

mercy, and peace.
May we live grace.
May we live mercy.

May we live peace
as we live lightly and
lovingly on our planet.

(adapted from Thessalonians 3:12-13)

Closing Words: All Are Worthy

All are worthy,
therefore may we
strive for all to feel

worthy, have peace,
well-being. Strength.

All are worthy,
therefore me we
strive for justice.

(adapted from Revelation 5:12-13)

Closing Words: Go Be the Power

Go. Create justice.
Create love.

Be the way to peace.
Be the truth of peace.
Be the light of peace.

Go. Be the Power
in the human spirit.

Closing Words: Go Knowing

Go out into the world
knowing that you are enough—
enough to hold the world.

May love enfold you.
May compassion uphold you.
May justice show you the way.

Go, rejoicing in the power
of the human spirit.

So may it be!

Closing Words: Go Blessed in Life's Bounty

May you be blessed by life's bounty.

May you be kept in earth's embrace.

May light precede you.

May justice inform you.

May peace follow you.

May gratitude mark your way.

So may it be!

Closing Words: Live, Nourish, Create

May you live in love.

May you nourish justice

May you breathe compassion.

May you embrace the power
of the human spirit.

May you live in gratitude.

all the days of your life.

.

So may it be!

Closing Words: Go With Power

Go out into the world.

Be fearless.

Ask questions.

Hold onto what is good.

Strengthen the weak.

Comfort the fearful.

Serve the suffering.

Do what makes *you* come alive.

Rejoice in the power of the human spirit.

So may it be!

Closing Words (Benediction) for a Wedding

May you live life curious.
May you rejoice in the process.
May you let go of the rage for control.
May you feel the flame and live well.

May you, every day, re-imagine reality's map.
May you keep exploring, even the dark places.
May you rejoice in the unknown.
May you hug uncertainty to you tight.

May you live life joyous.
May you find the miraculous.
May you continuously find gratitude.
May you love the messiness.
May you love yourself.
May you love all you love well. And well.

So may it be.

A Blessing for the Winter Holidays

May the holidays be as you dream.
And may your dreams embrace
the messiness of being human,
the ambiguity of relationship.

May your holidays be joyful,
in a joy tempered by loss,
in a joy of the bittersweet
flow of human life.

May the darkness and cold
teach us the deep truths
of light and warmth—that
they are our creation,
our doing,
and our joy.

May your holidays be as you dream,
remembering to be honored
participating in the great
cycles of the seasons,
in the circling of the earth,

and in the seasons of life.

So may it be

A Suggested Format for Humanist/Religious Naturalist Meetings

GATHERING

Bell sound

Welcome and Announcements

Bell Sound

Opening music:

Chalice Lighting

Congregational covenant

Love is the spirit of this place
and service (is) its law.

This is our great covenant:
to dwell together in peace;
the seek the truth in love;
and to help one another

(based on the writing of Unitarian minister James Vila Blake, 1880)

Congregational Singing

Multi Gen:

Singing the Children to Class:

Go now in peace, may love guide all your ways
Beauty be the blessings of your nights and days
Truth on your lips and kindness in your deeds
Faith to follow where the human spirit leads.

SHARING

Joys and Sorrows

Reading (optional)

Offering (optional)

LEARNING

Talk

Congregational singing

Extinguishing the Chalice:

We extinguish this flame,
But not the light of truth,
The warmth of community,
Or the fire of commitment.
All of these we carry in our hearts
And in our minds
Until we are together again.

DEPARTING

Closing music

Closing words



About the Author

Reverend David Breeden, Ph.D. is Senior Minister at First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis, a historically Humanist congregation.

He has an MFA from The Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, a Ph.D. from the Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi, with additional study at Breadloaf and in writing and Buddhism at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. He also has a Master of Divinity from Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago.

His poetry, essays, and short fiction have appeared in such journals as *Mississippi Review*, *Nebo*, *Poet Lore*, *Mid-American Review*, *North Atlantic Review*, *Boston Literary Review*, *Turnstile*, *Nidus*, and *Paragraph*. His many books are available online.

He is an adjunct faculty member of United Theological School in the Twin Cities, and Chairs the Education Committee of the American Humanist Association. He was awarded the 2023 Distinguished Service Award by the American Humanist Association.