

Handbook of Religious Services



Church of the Larger Fellowship

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Handbook of Religious Services Revised 2011

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Unitarian Universalist

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sity of Nebraska Press.

Dedication

Rev. Dr. Jane Rzepka,
CLF Minister Emerita,
who served as senior minister of
the Church of the Larger Fellowship
from 1999-2010

Under Jane Rzepka's leadership the CLF transformed from a "church by mail" to a "church on-line." Through the CLF her insightful, kind and very funny voice has become beloved around the world.

- Searl, Edward, ed. *Bless This Child: A Treasury of Poems, Quotations and Readings to Celebrate Birth..* Boston: Skinner House Books, 2006. (CLF) Poetry and prose on new life. Useful for composing birth announcements, birthday cards, performing readings at birth ceremonies and honoring adoptions.
- Searl, Edward. *In Memoriam: A Guide to Modern Funeral and Memorial Services.* Boston: Skinner House Books, 2000. (CLF) Practical, sensitive advice on all aspects of one of life's most difficult passages. Includes advice on writing eulogies and 11 sample services which can be used as they are or adapted as needed.
- Slaughter, Robert. *How to Preach a Sermon.* Boston: Skinner House, 1997. (CLF) A step-by-step guide through all of the elements of sermon writing and delivery, from choosing a topic and structuring a sermon to dealing with microphones and making effective but comfortable gestures.
- Singing the Living Tradition.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1993. (CLF) Hymns, rounds and readings for all types of services, holidays, and special occasions from the Unitarian Universalist Association.
- Singing the Journey: Supplement to Singing the Living Tradition.* Boston: Beacon Press, 2005. (CLF) Offers multicultural hymns, chants and songs for marking the seasons of our lives in a myriad of musical styles. Presents an exceptional variety of music for congregational singing. Moving pieces full of human experiences including sorrow, joy, compassion and a deep commitment to social justice.
- York, Sarah. *Remembering Well: Rituals for Celebrating Life and Mourning Death.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000. (CLF) Helps mourners give a voice to their sorrow. Offers family members, clergy, funeral professionals and hospice workers ways to plan services and rituals that honor the spirit of the deceased and respect the wishes of those who attend the services.

personal event, whether it's to celebrate an interfaith, intercultural first union, a second or third marriage (including one or both partners' children), a same-sex marriage, or a commitment ceremony.

Montgomery, Kathleen, ed. *Day of Promise: Collected Meditations, Volume One*, Boston: Skinner House Books, 2001. * (CLF, as *100 Meditations*) Gathered from the more than 1,700 meditations published since the consolidation of the Unitarians and Universalists in 1961, this collection was created with a specific audience in mind: a reader looking for comfort and challenge. This is one of many Meditation Manuals available from the CLF library and from the UUA Bookstore.

Murry, William R. *A Faith for All Seasons: Liberal Religion and the Crises of Life*. Bethesda, MD: River Road Press, 1990. (CLF) A compassionate and authentic affirmation of the central truths of our religion.

Rzepka, Jane & Sawyer, Ken. *Thematic Preaching: An Introduction*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001. (CLF) Lively and engaging practical advice about creating sermons whose sacred text is life itself, including illustrative sermons.

Seaburg, Carl, ed. *Great Occasions: Readings for the Celebration of Birth, Coming-of-Age, Marriage, and Death*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1998. (CLF) A rich array of some 650 pieces of writing which provide words to mark the passages of life: words which proclaim it is good to exist, to know the pleasures and duties of maturity, and to experience life in its sorrow and joy.

Searl, Edward, ed. *Beyond Absence: A Treasury of Poems, Quotations and Readings on Death and Remembrance*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2006. (CLF) Words ancient and modern on life's final passage. Useful for composing eulogies, readings at memorial services and funerals, and writing sympathy and condolence cards. Selections also offer comfort to the bereaved.

Foreword

The Church of the Larger Fellowship has published *Handbooks for Religious Services* for over thirty years. The Reverend George Marshall, its first editor, wrote, "The scattered members of the CLF often find themselves alone when facing the great issues of life—the dedication of children, the marriage of young people and adults, the final arrangements which come with death.... When we mourn, or when we rejoice, we want to be true to our ideals and our beliefs, and accordingly have services which express them.... The suggestions and services are arranged with our isolated families in mind."

We hope that this Handbook continues the tradition and is helpful to individuals and families in facing "the great issues of life." Cut and paste, adapt, make the services your own. And please know that the Church of the Larger Fellowship is with you in spirit.

Additional Resources: Books

Note: “(CLF)” denotes availability from the CLF Lending Library

- Fritts, Roger, *For As Long As We Both Shall Live*, New York: Avon Books, 1993. (CLF) Complete with all kinds of options for both traditional and nontraditional weddings, it includes all the basic parts of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish ceremonies. You’ll find valuable guidance on all aspects of wedding planning, including where to hold the ceremony, music, customs and traditions, wedding etiquette, and more.
- Haas, Robert & Mitchell, Stephen, eds., *Into the Garden: A Wedding Anthology*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994. For brides and grooms who want to give their weddings new depth and meaning, two acclaimed poet-translators have gathered a stunning collection of poems and prose that will add a unique and personal dimension to the ceremony.
- Kushner, Harold S. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. New York: Anchor, 1981, 2004. (CLF—book & tape) - The author, a Jewish rabbi facing his own child's fatal illness, deftly guides us through the inadequacies of the traditional answers to the problem of evil, then provides a practical and compassionate answer. Remarkable for its real-life examples, this book cannot go unread by anyone who has ever been troubled by the question, “Why me?”
- Metrick, Sydney Barbara, *I Do: A Guide to Creating Your Own Unique Wedding Ceremony*, Berkeley, Calif.: Celestial Arts, 1993. Beginning with an explanation of traditional wedding elements – the bridal veil, the exchange of rings, the cake, the vows – the author offers wedding alternatives drawn from ancient Greece and Persia, pagan Europe, Elizabethan England, and other traditions. Planning guides are included to help you create your own

Should the voyage of life bear us on separate courses,
 forget not:
 That the same stars shine over us,
 That we are warmed by the same sun,
 That we belong to the same human family,
 That the same ideals stir within our hearts,
 While we are absent from one another.

—*Source unknown*

Deep peace of the running wave to you,
 Deep peace of the flowing air to you,
 Deep peace of the great earth to you,
 Deep peace of the shining stars to you,
 Deep peace to each of us gathered here today.

—*Irish blessing (adapted)*

May the truth that makes us free,
 And the hope that never dies,
 And the love that casts out fear,
 Lead us forward together,
 ‘Til the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

—*Source unknown*

May the blessing of truth be upon us,
 May the power of love direct and sustain us,
 May the peace of this community preserve our going out and our
 coming in,
 From this time forth, until we meet again.

—*The Congregation of
 Abraxas*

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Chapter One

Unitarian Universalist Worship

Unitarian Universalist worship is as diverse as it is important. The origin of the word “worship” is in the old English *weorthscippen*, meaning to ascribe worth to something, to shape things of worth.

We worship, then, whenever we ascribe worth to some value, idea, object, person, experience, attitude, or activity, or whenever we give form or shape to that which we have already found to be of worth.

A worship experience can occur at any time, whether one is alone or part of a group. Whenever one perceives something beautiful; whenever there is a deep sense of connectedness with other persons, with the natural world, or with the transcendent (however defined); whenever one gains insight or a new sense of wholeness; whenever one perceives an ethical challenge; whenever life is deliberately focused or ordered—all of these situations may be considered worship.

When UUs gather for worship, they intend to create some kind of shared and worthwhile experience. A worship service is a deliberate shaping, ordering, or recalling of individual thoughts and experiences, done in the context of a community of people who share common values, ideas, and attitudes.

Sharing in worship with others helps us declare, celebrate, and affirm what is “of worth” in our lives and the world. To worship is to respond to the religious impulse, to give shape and meaning to existence, to be purposeful and positive as citizens of Earth.

Closing Words

Be ours a religion which, like sunshine, goes everywhere:
 Its temple, all space;
 Its creed, all truth;
 Its shrine, the good heart;
 Its scripture, all wisdom;
 Its ritual, works of love;
 Its profession of faith, divine living.

—*Theodore Parker*

And now may love hallow every home and every heart;
 May the light of truth shine bright among you,
 And bless you with wisdom, strength, and peace. Amen.

From “Leading Congregations in Worship-A Guide”

We have been blessed this morning by who we are and by the hope and promise inherent in the community we can build here. Remember that hope and promise. Remember that you are a unique and needed part of it. Live its beauty! Tell its story! Go in peace. Return with light. Amen.

—*John Corrado*

To those of you who came here seeking the holy,
 may the holy go with you.
 To those of you who came here seeking to embrace life,
 may life return your affection.
 To those of you who came here seeking a better way,
 may a way be found,
 and the courage to take it, step by step.

—*Robert Doss*

Thou Infinite Spirit of Life, kindle in our hearts the spirit of love and of understanding and of justice, and open our eyes to the perception of thy truth.

Bind us together, and with all our beloved, as members one of another.

And let all our worship be fruitful, in wisdom and in toil and in trust. Amen.

—*Dana McLean Greeley*

Between the morning and the night of our desires,
Between our ideals and our accomplishments,
We would pause to reflect on the meaning of life, and especially on the meaning of our own lives.

May we have the wisdom to see that only a few things bear the mark of the eternal:

The giving we have invested in others;

The love we have expressed in deeds;

The work we did because we loved it;

The truth we spoke and followed;

The justice we stood for, despite the fear of consequences;

The evil we turned into good, because we saw that none of us lives apart, but all are members one of another.

May we come to see the meaning of our days, so that we might begin to live more deeply and more fully.

May we lift up our eyes to the holy mountain and seek the steady stars at night.

In the quiet of the next few moments let us think on these things.

(Silence)

By the meditations of our hearts and the reflections of our minds, may we be lifted up in higher resolve and greater commitment.

Amen.

—*Source unknown*

The good news is that there is no great secret about how to create and conduct meaningful and satisfying worship! Many religious liberals mistakenly think that some mysterious “expertise” is required in order to be a worship planner or leader. They cannot imagine themselves capable of planning a worship experience that others will find rewarding and meaningful. While effective worship does require thoughtful and careful planning, it is not some lofty and difficult mystery. If we hesitate to offer our humanness through the form of worship, we miss an important opportunity to engage and improve our world.

Group Worship

Just as important as the content of any worship service is the setting that the worship leader(s) create. Many non-verbal dimensions of the worship experience can directly affect the quality of the service. First, arrange whatever space is being used to ensure that it looks and feels like “sacred” space—space that reflects the worth and beauty of what is being celebrated, cherished, affirmed, or embraced. Here are a few details that deserve attention:

First Impressions are Important Is the worship space clean, neat, and cared for? Is it bright, welcoming, and ready for the important business at hand? Are the chairs and other furniture thoughtfully and pleasingly arranged? Have extraneous objects been put away? Is the lighting comfortable? (Sometimes softening the lighting just as the service begins is very effective.) Does the worship space reflect the care and concern you have for your Unitarian Universalist religion? A little attention to such physical details can make a world of difference!

Starting on Time Some UU groups use a gentle gong or bell or soft prelude music to let people know that the service is about to begin and that it is time for them to take their seats and prepare themselves for worship. Beginning on time reduces the discomfort of visitors and communicates to everyone that you are well organized and serious about the service that is to take place.

Order of Service Provide an order of service for participants to follow. It can be printed ahead of time and handed out, or posted in front of the group. A printed order of service helps participants to relax, because they know that they do not have to worry about being surprised or confused during the service. If the group regularly recites or sings something together, make sure the words are printed for visitors.

That we may walk fittingly where birds sing,
That we may walk fittingly where grass is green,
O our Mother the Earth, O our Father the Sky.

—*A Tewa Prayer*

O Creative Spirit of Life,
We give thanks for all the blessings that are ours.
We seek strength to bear the pain that may be ours.
In our hearts, we would acknowledge our failures to keep faith
with our sisters and brothers.
This day and every day, may we affirm the grace of all creation;
May we be ever mindful of the world’s need for greater compassion,
justice and beauty. Amen.

—*Bruce Southworth*

God of the earth and the sky and the sea and the human soul,
We thank thee for all the seasons, and for the refreshment of life
and the incoming tide of the spirit and the harvest of our hopes
and our deeds.
Kindle ever new hope in our hearts.
Give us courage and kindness and dreams and resolution and
achievement.
We pray that we may minimize our weakness and magnify our
strength and do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with thee.
We pray for greater understanding among all people, beginning
with us.
We pray for patience and perseverance and faith and love. Amen.

Dana McLean Greeley

Silence for wisdom so that we may love,
 Silence for love so that we may be just,
 Silence for justice so that we may live fully.
 May we be more patient and more silent,
 so that we may proceed with courage and compassion.

—*Charles Gaines*

Let there be silence,
 let there be reverence in your heart.
 Let all the sounds of earth flood over you,
 in order that you may receive that which only silence can
 make possible.
 Drop down your burdens on the earth,
 and feel the strength of earth well up through you, flow
 upward from the ground through bone and sinew, into
 strength.
 Rest your heart in silence,
 and a thousand songs you never heard before will pour
 into your ears.
 Throw open the doors of your heart to all,
 and as its invitation answer finds, your heart will be full,
 and they who come will be filled as well.
 Let there be silence...let there be reverence.
 Let there be welcome,
 and there will be wonder in your heart.

—*Robert Weston*

O our Mother the Earth, O our Father the Sky,
 Your children are we, and with tired backs
 We bring you the gifts you love.
 Then weave for us a garment of brightness;
 May the warp be the white light of morning,
 May the weft be the red light of evening,
 May the fringes be the falling rain,
 May the border be the standing rainbow.
 Thus weave for us a garment of brightness,

Greenery or Flowers Live plants or flower arrangements can add greatly to an atmosphere of peace, reflection, serenity, and beauty. Place them carefully to complement other worship-space objects (chalice, symbols, banners).

A Focal Point When you arrange the room to draw attention to a central point—perhaps adjacent to a podium, lectern, or pulpit—you enhance the experience of comfort, community, inspiration, and sense of purpose that shared worship can bring.

Art Objects, Symbols, Decorations Drawing attention to a single object, symbol, or decoration helps people to focus on the matter at hand. Simplicity is usually the key to effective use of flowers, paintings, sculptures, or banners. One large piece, centrally located, is often more effective than several small pieces. If possible, find an object that is related to the day's theme; it can be enjoyed in itself and provide reinforcement for the theme in symbolic form. Symbols are particularly well suited to worship because they invite viewers to ponder their personal responses.

The Flame of Fellowship Lighting a candle or chalice at the start of a service, when repeated week after week, can become a powerful and meaningful symbol to focus group worship. You may do this with or without spoken words. (Several examples can be found on pages 8-9 and 57-58.)

Audio-Visuals Technical problems with audio-visual equipment can disrupt a service and distract a congregation. If you use projectors, sound systems, video equipment, or microphones, set them up and check them out beforehand. If possible, have someone other than the worship leader operate the machines, and do a complete technical rehearsal in the meeting room with that person.

Music Music can bring about religious and spiritual experiences that words cannot. Music evokes moods of celebration and contemplation, amplifying and intensifying the spoken word. Live music has excitement and immediacy, but recorded music (if carefully selected and skillfully presented) can also be effective. Music in a service should complement what has gone before and lead into what happens next. Congregational singing invites active participation in the service.

Congregational Participation Merely by their presence, individuals who come to worship are participating. In addition, participation can be formalized by hymns, unison and responsive readings and affirmations, shared announcements, personal joys or concerns, or a discussion time after the service. As a rule, some structured participation enriches worship for the congregation, but services can be effective without it. Varying the forms of congregational participation can help prevent “staleness” and offer additional levels of engagement for those who attend.

Inclusion of Children While most children will not be happy sitting through a full-length sermon oriented toward adults, there are many ways to involve children in worship. Intergenerational worship works well with stories, skits, rituals, simple songs, opportunities to share personal stories and with any form of movement. Even services designed for adults can be enhanced by including a Time of All Ages at the beginning, during which there is a story or interactive talk with children on the subject of the service.

Here are several examples of simple orders of service:

As the budding flower bursts into bloom,
As the glowing light kindles into flame,
May the spirit of life and love
bloom and flame within us,
with ever-renewing light and love.

—Dorris Dow Alcott

Meditations and Prayers

In the sacred stillness of a shared silence,
Let us listen to the wisdom of our own hearts and minds.

From “Leading Congregations in Worship—A Guide”

Let us seek the quiet and the calm.
Let us lay aside our loud calling.
Let us lay aside our struggle.
Speak softly:
Let us listen to the melodies that recall other proportions.
Our moments tarry not with us.
Let us then seek the dimension that endures...
beyond all requirement and all particularity.
Let us speak softly that we may hear...
Let us enter into the quiet.

—Timothy Ashton

How quiet it is when we have the patience to be silent.
How much we can learn in moments like these.
We can learn to have patience within ourselves,
to better understand who and what we are.
We can learn to have patience with others,
to better listen to what they say and how they feel.
We can learn to have patience with life,
to better work with it, rather than against it.
How much we *do* need silence:
Silence for truth so that we may learn wisdom,

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations, and inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity.

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings, but that we are connected—in mystery and miracle—to the universe, to this community, and to each other.

From “Leading Congregations in Worship—A Guide”

Chalice or Candle Lighting Words

Unitarian Universalist congregations are dedicated to the proposition that behind all our differences and beneath all our diversity there is a unity which makes us one and binds us forever together in spite of time and death and the space between the stars. We pause in silent witness to this unity. (*Light flame.*)

—*David Bumbaugh*

May the light we now kindle inspire us to use our powers:
to heal and not to harm,
to help and not to hinder,
to bless and not to curse,
to serve you, spirit of freedom.

—*Passover Haggadah*

In the light of truth
and the warmth of love,
we gather to seek, to sustain, to share.

—*Marjorie Montgomery*

We gather this hour
With joys and sorrows, gifts and needs.
We light this beacon of hope, sign of our quest for truth and meaning,
In celebration of the life we share together.

—*Christine Robinson*

Service A

Musical Prelude

Opening Words

Hymn or Song

Chalice or Candle Lighting

Joys and Concerns, Announcements

Reading or Meditation

Musical Interlude

Offertory

Sermon

Hymn or Song

Closing Words

Musical Postlude

Service C

Welcome

Music

Reading

Music or Silent Meditation

Sermon

Music

Closing Words

Service B

Welcome and Announcements

Joys and Concerns

Musical Prelude

Chalice or Candle Lighting

Hymn

Reading(s)

Silent or Spoken Meditation

Offertory

Sermon

Musical Meditation

Benediction

Service D

Opening Words

Chalice or Candle Lighting

Silent Meditation

Sermon or Address

Closing Words

Family Worship

Some form of religious observance—call it worship, celebration, or what you will—is necessary to our spiritual growth whether we're part of a congregation or not. We may worship, celebrate, sing, and meditate by ourselves when we feel the need. We may also create opportunities to do these things together as a family in our own home, whether or not we belong to a congregation.

As Corita Kent wrote:

*In trying to get hold of things mysterious
we try to invent something definite
and mystery can never be defined
or must always be redefined
or better yet
come at newly and indirectly
through stories and things around us
thru parables and food ... with the ordinary
everyday people
and stuff around us.*

Jews have strengthened their faith through centuries of Diaspora, or wide dispersal, by means of family observances: lighting Sabbath candles at the dinner table, celebrating Passover with a ceremonial family meal, reliving the story of the eight days of Hanukkah. How can UU families, despite the hectic pace of our lives, create our own occasions for getting hold of the mystery, using “the ordinary everyday people and stuff around us?”

The Rev. Robert L'H. Miller, former member of the CLF's religious education committee, has written:

The stuff of your daily life experience and its language and style of expression should provide content and context for family celebrations. Our celebrations affirm our beliefs in the goodness of life, the supreme worth of persons, the creative process

Service leader: We come together:

Right side: We come together committed to search for the light that is right for ourselves and all other human beings.

Left side: We come together respecting and valuing our differences, differences we share openly and honestly.

Right side: We come together in love, with respect and concern for selves.

Left side: The selves in us and the selves in others.

All: To be the best we can be, we come together.

From “Leading Congregations in Worship—A Guide”

May the blessings of our fellowship be upon us in this hour and in the days to come:

That we may seek the truth more devotedly,
That we may think more independently,
That we may reflect more searchingly,
That we may know ourselves more completely,
That we may love more freely,
That we may forgive more quickly,
That we may pray more thoughtfully,
That we may act more courageously,
That we may live more nobly.

—Paul Carnes

Our many different paths come together in this special place, graced by the history of our free religious heritage.

Let us be mindful of forces deep within which call us to become more than we are.

May this hour bring rest and renewal, comfort and challenge.

Opening Words

Come into the circle of caring,
 Come into the community of gentleness, of justice and love.
 Come, and you shall be refreshed.
 Let the healing power of this people penetrate you,
 Let loving kindness and joy pass through you,
 Let hope interfuse you,
 And peace be the law of your heart.
 In this human circle,
 Caring is a calling.
 All of us are called.
 So come into the circle of caring.

—Richard Gilbert (*adapted*)

From our fragmented personal worlds,
 we gather here to seek wholeness.
 From the feeling of isolation and loneliness,
 we come here to feel connectedness.
 From the vast evils in the world,
 we seek here to relate to what is good.
 From the tempting idols of the mind and the confusion of the spirit,
 we would find here something of meaning.
 From the proclamations of doom on every hand,
 we would find here what is hopeful.
 From thoughtless non-caring,
 we would be charged here with the spirit of vital faith
 in ourselves and love for our human family.

—Source unknown

of sharing, the search for truth. Our celebrations clarify our values and help us to learn what is good. What kind of person am I, what kind of persons are others? Our celebrations enhance our feeling of fellowship, oneness, awareness of traditions, family roots and heritage—a sense of freedom to speak, think and participate.

Celebrating Here are some ideas and suggestions to stir up your own creativity. Choose what seems to fit your family, realizing that your ways of celebrating life will change as your family changes, but also that you may be starting traditions that will continue for generations.

Whatever pattern of religious celebration you develop, make it your own, enjoy it, and keep it flexible so that it can grow and change. Worshipping together can enrich your experience of life and deepen your relations with one another.

Around the Dinner Table If yours is one of those families that never seems able to sit down for a meal together, try to find at least one time during the week when this can happen. It may turn out to be a weekend breakfast instead of an evening meal. If, on the other hand, you regularly gather around the dinner table, you have more opportunities for the simple observances that can make the time together meaningful for all. You may want to say words like these together:

May the love we share around this table with family and friends renew us in spirit.

May the spirit of hope, joy, peace, and love dwell within our hearts this day and forever more. Amen.

[Or]

In the light of love and the warmth of this family
 We gather to seek, to sustain, and to share.

Lighting a Chalice or a Candle You can make your own chalice by placing a small votive candle in a shallow bowl. When you sit down together, take turns lighting the chalice and saying special words. You'll find suggestions in Chapter 5. Or simply say,

Today, I'm thankful for...

This flame is to help us remember...

Today, I'm thinking about...

This day is important to me because...

Celebrating Milestones and Special Occasions Birthdays are a cause for celebration, of course! In addition to your usual practices, add a few minutes to reflect on the past year and share favorite memories about the birthday person, ways in which he or she has grown, and wishes and hopes for the coming year.

Other occasions warrant celebrations: promotions, getting onto the team or into the chorus or school play, getting a driver's license, the baby's first words or first steps, or a "first time ever" or "first time this year" for just about anything significant to you.

Seasons of the year are natural points of celebration: first days of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, and also those cross-quarter days halfway between equinox and solstice, such as Candlemas or Ground Hog Day, May Day, August 1 (*Lammas* to the ancients), Halloween or All Souls Day (a good Universalist holiday!).

Birthdays of Famous UUs and Others Choose a "famous birthday" to celebrate for each month—this could be a Unitarian Universalist or another person whose life and values you respect. Let various members of the family be responsible for decorations, food, and appropriate stories or readings or songs. If cake with candles is what makes it happy birthday time at your house, then do it for Thomas Jefferson and Clara Barton as well!

Responsive Reading

Read responsively with leader, or divide group into two sections and alternate.

In a world with so much hatred and violence,

All: We need a religion that proclaims the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

In a world with so much brutality and fear,

We need a religion that seeks justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.

In a world with so many persons abused and neglected,

We need a religion that calls us to accept one another and encourage one another to spiritual growth.

In a world with so much dogmatism and falsehood,

We need a religion that challenges us to a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

In a world with so much tyranny and oppression,

We need a religion that affirms the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process.

In a world with so much inequality and strife,

We need a religion that strives toward the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

In a world with so much environmental degradation,

We need a religion that advocates respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

In a world with so much uncertainty and despair,

We need a religion that teaches our hearts to hope, and our hands to serve.

—Scott W Alexander

Chapter Five

Readings and Meditations for Group and Formal Worship

What follows is a collection of readings and meditations you may wish to insert in addition to, or in place of, selections appearing in the services outlined in Chapters 2 through 4.

Or you may find this collection a helpful resource on special occasions in your community or within your family. There are Opening Words, Chalice or Candle Lighting Words, Meditations and Prayers, Closing Words, Table Graces, and Bedtime Prayers.

The Responsive Reading below is based on the Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes as stated in the Bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Use it in its entirety, or repeat the first seven principles as an affirmation of your Unitarian Universalist beliefs.

Worshipping at Home

You can create your own worship services at home. Sunday morning is the traditional time, but you may find another time that suits your family better. Weekly is the usual interval, but you might begin with a monthly service and move toward greater frequency.

Create a Setting You may decide to do one of the following:

- Gather around a table with a chalice, candles, flowers, or special objects.
- Form a half circle of chairs around the fireplace, perhaps adding a special picture on the mantelpiece.
- Spread a bright-colored cloth on the floor, arranging bits of nature or art around your chalice in the center and sitting around in a circle.
- Gather outdoors in a beautiful spot.

Create a Pattern Here is the format one CLF family uses for a Sunday morning service in their living room:

- Each member of the family lights a candle.
- Opening words: a favorite poem or something appropriate from the newspaper, a magazine, or a book (also see Chapter 5).
- Recorded music.
- Thoughts for the week: each person shares high points and low points of the past week, what they are looking forward to in the coming week, and anything they are worrying about.
- Closing words or a song they sing together.

They take turns doing the opening words and choosing the music. Sometimes they go on to do a session from the CLF's multi-age curriculum (<http://clf.uua.org/re/express.html>).

Another Way to Create a Service Together

- Provide a box or paper bag into which you can drop ideas or themes for services as they occur to you: for example, P. T. Barnum's Birthday, or Harvest Moon, or Helping Others, or Making Our Home Ecologically Responsible, or Black History Month.
- After your family worship, but while you are still gathered in your worship space, have a family member reach into the box or bag and pull out a slip of paper with a theme.
- Decide among you who is to be responsible for 1) creating a visual focal point, 2) opening words, 3) a song, 4) a reading, and 5) a closing. Agree to present the service next time you gather.
- Do it!

You might also plan a service around religious questions that members of the family raise. Take some time to gather ideas and materials that focus on the question in different ways. Encourage other members of the family to say how they feel about the question or what their responses might be. The point, of course, is not so much to answer the question as to give it the attention and focus that it deserves and to keep those big questions coming. You might use the CLF's Between Sunday web page to think about questions at www.clfuu.org/betweensundays.

Out of things it rises,
And laughs, and loves, and sings;
Slowly it subsides
Into the char of things.

Yet a voice soars above it—
Love is great and strong;
The best of us forever
Escapes, in love and song.

—*John Hall Wheelock*

[Or]

Gently, reverently, we lay these ashes away: May they lie softly in our memories of you. No one could know how many eons and eons it took to bring this miraculous blossoming of dust to the beauty of you. Nor whether, if ever, in some unknown eon to come, it will awaken again to the same unanswerable questions.

—*Source unknown*

[Or]

It nearly cancels my fear of death, my dearest said, when I think of cremation. To roar up in flame—I am used to it. I have flamed with love or fury so often in my life, no wonder my body is tired, no wonder it is dying. We had great joy of my body. Scatter the ashes....

—*Robinson Jeffers*

Such a service could also begin with a pre-selected reading and end with another, in order to provide an appropriate context for the spontaneous comments of the participants.

Committal Service Components

Committal services at the graveside or where the ashes are to be scattered are usually brief. In addition to the Words of Committal, you may wish to include a reading or two, a prayer, and a benediction. Or, if the committal is the only service being held, you may wish to plan a longer service; see materials in the Memorial Service.

Words of Committal

(For interring a body or burying ashes)

With deep reverence, we lay the [body/ashes] of [name of deceased] in this hallowed ground. Here, under the wide and open sky, this child of creation will rest in peace. And we dedicate this simple place, amid these natural surroundings, to [her/his] memory. We lay [her/his body/ her/his ashes] in that gentle earth which has been humanity's chief support since we first walked beneath the sun. To the good earth and the great nature that are the source of human existence, we now give back the body of our loved one. We leave [her/him] in peace with our thoughts of love and tenderness. Thinking of [her/him] thus, let us go in quietness of spirit and live in understanding one with another. Now may [her/his] spirit abide in our hearts, even as the eternal spirit has descended upon [her/him] in benediction this day. Amen.

(For the scattering or burial of ashes following cremation)

Life burns us up like a fire,
And song goes up in flame;
The body returns in ashes
To the ashes whence it came.

Chapter Two

Child Namings and Dedications

The following two Unitarian Universalist child-naming and dedication services are distinctly different. You may use them exactly as presented, or mix and match elements in a service you create to meet the needs of a particular family and situation. *Remember that the bracketed [] portions in these services indicate where choices are to be made.*

Parents may wish to participate in planning the order and content of the service, perhaps adding favorite readings or poetry. A child naming and dedication is enriched by such personalization, and, if interested, the family should be invited to participate in a planning session scheduled well in advance of the service date.

If the parents come from differing faith traditions, the service may need to reflect this by being inclusive of both heritages. An obvious goal of any service is to make all in attendance feel welcomed, affirmed, and included.

Don't be surprised or disappointed, however, if a family declines the invitation to take an active part in the planning process. Many will prefer that you do all the preparation, and will gladly take part in whatever ways you indicate.

Child namings and dedications are wonderful occasions, so enjoy your participation.

A Child-Naming and Dedication Service

Order of Service

Opening Words

Address to Those Gathered

[OR] Responsive Reading

Address to Parents

Reading

Call to Children Attending

(optional)

Naming and Dedication

Affirmation by those in Attendance

Blessing of the Child

Benediction

Opening Words

The poet e. e. cummings reminds us:

...we can never be born enough. we are human beings for whom birth is a supremely welcome mystery. the mystery of growing, the mystery which happens only and whenever we are faithful to ourselves. life for eternal us is now.

A Quaker-Style Memorial Service

Order of Service

Opening Silent Meditation

Sharing Remembrances

Closing Circle

Another form of memorial service which can be very meaningful and comforting is a “Quaker-style” participatory service. Such a service requires little or no formal planning as it is essentially spontaneous in nature.

One person who attended such a service described it as “the most beautiful and meaningful memorial service I ever attended” and went on to describe how such a service happens:

“In the traditional Quaker manner, all sat around in a circle with only a rug and a large candle in the center, and a number of those who knew the deceased spoke feelingly of what she had meant to them, and what she had done for other people.

“There were no rehearsed speeches, no formal eulogy by someone who had to be briefed. The testimonies were given from firsthand experience and from the heart...and at the end, all joined hands with their neighbors, in accordance with their custom.”

If you decide to hold such an informal service, it is wise to inform all who will be attending of the spontaneous and participatory nature of the service, so that all can be comfortable and can collect their thoughts, remembrances, and affirmations before the event. Some may wish to write down what they will share.

The service could begin with the leader calling the group into a few minutes of reflective silence. After the sharings have seemingly run their course, with periods of silence allowed in between, the leader could ask the group to stand and hold hands in a circle, thereby bringing the service to a close.

When Death Comes to a “Difficult” Person

And because [name of deceased
_____] sometimes had a difficult time with life and others, this reading from Margaret Bruner:

“Say this of me, if something need be said,
when from this house of clay my soul has fled;
say that I tried,
but could not always keep the high resolve.
The road was very steep,
and often when I needed poise and strength I faltered on the last,
hard, mountainous length.
If I had foes, I have forgiven them,
but this is worthy of no diadem.
And if by some I was misunderstood,
to these I leave a wish that all good things may be their portion.
Know for every wrong I did, I paid in agony.
In song I poured my heart’s blood out to make amend.
I speak these words to kindred and friend.
Grant me compassion now that life has passed,
and pray my spirit finds peace at last.”

When Death Comes to Someone the Service Leader Doesn’t Know

I share with you the agony of your grief; the anguish of your heart finds echo in my own. I know I cannot enter all you feel nor bear with you the burden of your pain; I can but offer what my love does give: the strength of caring, the warmth of one who seeks to understand the silent storm-swept barrenness of so great a loss. This I do in quiet ways, that on your lonely path you may not walk alone.

—Howard Thurman

Address to Those Gathered

(Choose one of the following two sections)

The ceremony in which we now share is both ancient and timeless. In all parts of the earth, and from the earliest days of recorded history, parents have brought their children at an early age to a place of worship, sharing their joy and dedication with those of the wider community.

Traditionally, the element of water (*point to the water that is to be used in the ceremony*) has played a symbolic part in this ceremony, for all life has arisen from the waters, and it is through water that life is sustained as it flows forward like a river.

Traditionally, this is also the time to recognize our children by name, for it is by name that each of us is acknowledged as a unique and separate person. The [flower/s] we shall present to [this child is/ these children are] also symbolic of the individuality we wish to affirm.

This is a public occasion, shared by parents, family, and friends, to mark the fact that we all have a responsibility for the care and nurturing of every child. It is our task to give them a world of peace and justice in which to grow. It is our task to share with them our ideals and hopes. It is our task to learn from them the zest and wonder of life, with which all children come into the world, and which we too often lose in later life.

[Or]

(Responsive)

All: In welcoming a child, we celebrate the miracle of birth.

Leader: This is a time for joy. We rejoice when a child is born into the care and concern, not only of parents, but also of our community.

All: Every child born into the world needs the love and care of

others. Each deserves to be held in loving arms and to be taught good ways of living.

Leader: Each child has the right to know what it means to be fully human and what we must do to make life beautiful and good for ourselves, for each other, and for all the living beings who share this earth home with us.

All: **In welcoming a child, we celebrate our hopes for life.**

Address to the Parents

[First names of parent(s)
_____], to you as parents let me say this: In presenting your child at this service, you invite all of us to share some of the joy and responsibility that is yours as parents. You seek our support in your dedication to the task of fostering, with love and guidance, the fullest unfolding of the personality of your child.

Your task may not always be an easy one. The time may come when you will be called upon to sacrifice ambitions, deny yourselves pleasure, or set aside your own dreams so that your child may tread more surely the onward path of life. But you accept this service to another life, knowing that your own lives will be fuller and richer in consequence.

Do you now promise that, to the best of your human abilities, you will help this child to an appreciation of truth and beauty, uprightness of character, and love? If so, say, "We do."

Meditation

Let us join in meditation.

Spirit of Life, we are your children. Out of the infinite we have come to you and through you. We are the old, yet ever new, miracle of incarnation. Give us a chance to grow, within the warmth of your unfailing love, into souls sensitive to beauty, hearts open

When Death Comes by Suicide

We come here bearing our grief and perhaps feeling bruised by this death and what we might have done to prevent it. Remember that no single act of desperation can portray a life. No matter how stalked by hurt, this life also had its moments of delight and happiness, caring and friendship, sharing and love. Let us be daring enough never to forget these.

Let us admit the deep truth that none of us carries enough concern for our brothers and sisters on this earth. We try with our best resources, with what we can bring to bear, with what we can lavish out of self at the time. But sometimes it may not be enough, though our failures are not through callousness.

Self-death does not mean life denial, but it is the cry of despair for more life. It is the refusal to crawl forever through the yawning caverns of pain and absurdity. The battle may be long and arduous, leaving a personal sense of alienation after an epic conflict within the self. Whenever a death cuts across a life, we are left with a certain incompleteness. We know that [s/he] leaves much unfinished, unfulfilled, unsaid. There are yet other things we wanted to share with [her/him], and [s/he] with us. But what has been must suffice. What is and cannot be changed must be accepted. We are simply thankful that we could know and partake in the journey of life with [her/him], for it has enriched us all.

Peter Raible

Let us honor the life of [name of deceased] by living, ourselves, more nobly and lovingly in the days ahead. As you return to the routines of your lives, go in great peace, dear friends, and may [God/an abiding peace] go with you. Amen.

Memorial Readings for Specific Situations

When Death Comes for the Very Aged

There is, it seems, something tenderly appropriate in the death of the very aged. When the duties of life have all been done; when the sun touches the horizon; when the purple twilight falls upon the past, the present, and the future; when memory with dim eyes can no longer easily spell the blurred and faded records of the vanished days—then death comes like a strain of music. The road has been long, the journey difficult, and the traveler stops at the welcoming inn.

—Robert Ingersoll

When Death Comes Prematurely

Leaves should not fall in early summer. Winter should not follow on the heels of spring. Yet when they do, we can and must speak for life. For there is no answer to death but to live vigorously and beautifully. We give respect and dignity to the one we mourn only when we respect and dignify life and move toward its richest fulfillment.

—Angus MacLean

The morning glory that blooms for an hour
Differs not at heart
From the giant pine that lives for a thousand years.

—Zen Proverb

to love and hungry for the imperishable values of life. Do not shrink and wither us with fear, but quicken with faith the springs of courage within us.

Enter with us through the gates of wonder, into the wider perspectives of the morrow. Accept us as we grow into a fellowship of mutual respect and shared responsibility, that we in our turn may be worthy fathers and mothers of the coming generation.

—Source unknown

Reading for an Adopted Child

We did not plant you...

True.

But when the season is done

when the alternate prayers for sun and rain are counted,

When the pain of weeding and the pride of watching are through,

Then will we hold you high,

a shining sheaf above the thousand seeds grown wild.

Not by our planting

but, by heaven, our harvest,

Our child.

—Carol Lynn Pearson

Naming and Dedication

The leader can either hold the infant—placing the service on the table, or having someone hold the pages so it can be read—or have the parents or god-parents continue to hold the infant.

[Parents' first names

_____], by what name is this child known? (*Parents give complete name of child; leader will have written name in advance in space below.*)

(Leader dips fingers in water and touches child's forehead.)

[Child's complete name _____], I touch your young brow with water from old nature's infinite sky, water that touches every shore and nourishes every race of people. In so doing I dedicate your life and thought to the good of all humankind and to your own true growing.

I also give you this flower, unique in all its natural beauty, separate and distinct from all other flowers found in creation, to express symbolically our hope that all your life long you will unfold and blossom just as you must, in all of your own unique and natural beauty.

(Leader then lays a hand on the child's forehead.) May the blessings of an understanding heart, strength and integrity of purpose, and love received and given, be yours and remain with you as you go forward into ever fuller life. Amen.

Affirmation by Those in Attendance

Would you all please rise and join with me in saying the affirmation printed before you:

As we contemplate the miracle of birth, as we renew in our hearts a sense of wonder and joy, may we be stirred to a fresh awareness of the sacredness of life and of the divine promise of childhood. May we so live that our children may acquire our best virtues and leave behind our worst failings. May we pass on the light of courage and compassion and the questing spirit, and may that light burn more brightly in this child than it has in us.

Call to Children in Attendance *(optional)*

I invite the children present to come forward now. *(Children come forward.)* You are closest to this child in age and will be working and playing and growing in the same world together. It is good that at this time [s/he] should be surrounded by you and your good wishes. There is another reason for you to be here. In

[And/or]

Life is worth the living. It is good and it is beautiful, in spite of the tragedy with which it is forever beset. We glory in life, undergirded by the faith that its goodness is pervasive, that it is part of the texture of life, that it is of the essence of the nature of things. This is a profound faith, this confidence in life, more profound than we perhaps suspect, because it stands upon faith and faith alone. There is no proof for it, no objective test to support it, except the living of life itself, but this is perhaps the best test of all. And so we go on, those who have known sorrow and those who have not, strong in the faith that life is somehow good, even though we do not always understand it. We go on, no matter what befalls us, doing the right, following the true and the good. We go on, living the life we are given to live, knowing that it is a good life, however difficult it may at times seem to be. And in so living, we shall find that our faith is not false, that life is good to those who live it with serenity and fortitude.

—Duncan Howlett, adapted

Benediction

(also appropriate for committal service)

It is done. We have bid loving farewell to [name of deceased _____]. [*Describe disposition of the body, e.g., Her/his body has been/ will be committed to the purifying flame/ the keeping of mother earth.*]

“Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

We are glad that [name of deceased _____] lived. We are glad that we saw [her/his] face and felt the glow of [her/his] friendship and love. We cherish the memory of [her/his] words and deeds and character. Carrying [her/him] thus in our hearts, let us now go from this place in comfort and peace, assured that even in this time of loss and sorrow, life remains precious and good. May we also on this day rekindle in our hearts an appreciation for the gifts of life and other persons.

It is to each of you, then, that the living memories of [name of deceased]'s life are committed. To your hearts and minds go the enduring remembrances of this life. There will now be a period of [silence/ musical meditation]. I ask that each of you use these moments to remember [name of deceased] as only you can. Let us enter this meditation reverently, and with love.

(End the meditation after 1 to 3 minutes with:) Amen.

Readings

(optional) Several readings that seem appropriate to this particular life and death could be read. Perhaps the family has a favorite selection of scripture or poetry. Family and friends could be asked in advance to bring any readings they feel are appropriate.

(Introduce readings by saying:) [We/I] have selected several readings which seem particularly appropriate on this day when we acknowledge the death and celebrate the life of [name of deceased].

(Readings are shared.)

Summation

We close with these final words: “When I am dead, cry for me a little, think of me sometimes, but not too much. It is not good for you or your wife or husband or your children to allow your thoughts to dwell too long upon the dead. Think of me now and again as I was in life, at some moment which is pleasant to recall, but not for too long. Leave me in peace, as I shall leave you too in peace. While you live, let your thoughts be with the living.”

—Theodora Kroeher

dedicating this child, we all rejoice and give thanks for the presence of all children in our lives. And while the words we say and the promises we make for this child are meant especially for [him/her], they are also meant for you.

Charge to the Children

(optional)

Today we welcome [name of child]. As [s/he] grows, [s/he] will look up to you older children. Will you be a friend to [her/him]? Will you speak to [her/him] with kindness and treat [her/him] with fairness? Will you show [her/him] the best that is in you and help [her/him] to discover the best that is in [her/him]? If you will, please answer, “Yes.” *(Children may return to their seats.)*

Blessing of the Child

And we bless you now, [name of child] with this ancient Irish blessing:

May the blessing of the light be with you always, light without and light within. May the sun shine upon you and warm your heart until it glows like a great fire so that others may feel the warmth of it. And may the light of your eyes shine like two candle lights in a window at night, bidding the wanderer to come in out of the dark and the cold. And may the blessings of the rain be upon you, the sweet and tender rain; may it fall upon your spirit as when flowers spring up and fragrance fills the air. And may the blessings of the great rain wash you clean and fair, and may the storms always leave you stronger and more beautiful. And when the rains are over, may there be clear pools of water, made beautiful by the radiance of your light, as when a star shines, beautiful in the night, pointing the way for all of us.

Benediction

We have dedicated [name of child
_____]. May we also dedicate ourselves this day. May this occasion work its miracle in our hearts, that we may mold our lives more and more in accordance with the beauty, truth, goodness, and love we wish for the life of [name of child
_____].

A Short Service of Child Recognition

Order of Service

Opening Words

Charge to Parents

Naming

Charge to Community

Presentation of Certificate and Flower

Benediction

Opening Words

In the ancient tradition of all human society, we have come together to welcome and to recognize among us the great and persistent mystery of ongoing human life and to recognize the need for a family of mutual support.

Across the years, the words echo:

“See, I have set before thee this day, life and good, and death and evil; therefore, choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”

“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.”

[And/or]

Centuries ago the Roman philosopher Seneca wrote:

“In the presence of death, we must continue to sing the song of life. We must be able to accept death and go from its presence better able to bear our burdens and to lighten the load of others. Out of our sorrows should come understanding. Through our sorrows we join with all of those before us who have had to suffer and all of those who will yet have to do so. Let us not be gripped by the fear of death. If another day be added to our lives, let us joyfully receive it, but let us not anxiously depend on our tomorrows. Though we grieve the deaths of our loved ones, we accept them and hold on to our memories as precious gifts. Let us make the best of our loved ones while they are with us, and let us not bury our love with death.”

(Adapted)

Personal Reflections/Eulogy

At this point in the service the leader or some other designated person—with or without the contributions of others—could speak personally and particularly of the person for whom the memorial service is being held.

(Following Eulogy, leader says:) These, then, are a few of [our/my] thoughts and remembrances of [name of deceased
_____].

Whether or not [I/we] have succeeded in accurately portraying [her/his] life, it is surely as Charles Gaines has written:

“No person can sum up the life of another. Life is too precious to be passed over with mere words which ring empty. Rather it must remain as it is remembered by those who loved and watched and shared. For such memories are alive, unbound by events of birth and death. And as living memories, we possess the greatest gift one person can give another.”

We are here for all these things. But our first spiritual task is to face, full and unafraid, the reality of this death, and the grief and loss we feel.

—*Scott W. Alexander*

Readings

(Any or all of the following readings can be used.)

A. Powell Davies wrote:

“When sorrow comes, let us accept it simply, as a part of life. Let the heart be open to pain; let it be stretched by it. All the evidence we have says that this is the better way. An open heart never grows bitter. Or if it does, it cannot remain so. In the desolate hour there is an outcry, a clenching of the hands upon emptiness, a burning pain of bereavement, a weary ache of loss. But anguish, like ecstasy, is not forever. There comes a gentleness, a returning quietness, a restoring stillness. This, too, is a door to life. Here, also, is a deepening of meaning—and it can lead to dedication, a going forward to the triumph of the soul, the conquering of the wilderness. In the process will come a deepening inward knowledge that, in the final reckoning, all is well.”

[And/or]

Frank Carleton Doan has written:

“This death of the body, is it not in the natural order of things in the physical universe? Behold the flowers of the field. They bloom for a brief season and then wither away. The birds of the air, they ascend for their last flight, then descend to fold their wings and find peace in their nest, even the peace of death. So, too, it is with the beasts of the forest. When their time is come, they seek out some quiet, secluded spot, make their last lair, and lay them down there to die; unafraid they, and unashamed.... What are we that we should think to escape this common destiny of all earthly things, or resent this final blow of fate called death?”

“In their teachings, superior parents guide their children but do not pull them along; they urge them to go forward and do not suppress them; they open the way but do not take them to the place.”

And the poet Gibran wrote, “Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself. You may give them your love but not your thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams. And though they are with you they belong not to you.”

Charge to Parents

Friends, you bring your child to be recognized as a testimony to the universal mystery of ongoing human life. Will you endeavor to instruct [her/him] that [s/he] may be taught human love by feeling human love, taught justice by the laws that rule [her/his] days; taught wisdom by the way in which [s/he] lives, taught to love all people and serve them fair by seeing from [her/his] birth other children served with the same righteous, all-embracing care? If so, answer, “We will.”

Naming

(If recognizing more than one child, name them and confirm their names one at a time.)

What name have you given this child?

(Parents answer:) [Child’s name _____].

In the name of love and life, I confirm to you the name of [child’s name _____].

Charge to the Wider Community

Our children are not put into the hands of parents alone. They are brought at birth into a vast and infinite school. The universe is charged with the office of their education. Nature, society, and experience are volumes opened everywhere and perpetually before their eyes. They take lessons from every object within the sphere of their senses and their activity, from the sun and stars, from the flowers of spring and the fruits of autumn, from every associate, from every smiling and frowning countenance, from their friendships and dislikes, from the varieties of human character, and from the consequences of their actions.

—*William Ellery Channing*

We perform this ceremony to declare that all of us, as parents and as members of society, are responsible for the care and nurture of all children. It is our task to give them a world of peace and justice in which to grow. It is our task to give them our ideals and our hopes.

By dedicating [name/s of child/ren
_____] here today, these parents acknowledge that children are more than private possessions, but are new beings for whom we all have a responsibility, and therefore all welcome to the community.

Presentation of Flower

(Present the flower to the parents.) As this flower unfolds in natural beauty, so may [her/his] life unfold, and so may your lives together be full of ever-unfolding beauty.

Address

We have gathered here [describe setting, e.g., in this place of human aspiration and hope/ in this beautiful setting
_____] to acknowledge the death of [name of deceased
_____], whom we have known and loved. When someone we have cared for dies, [describe situation of death, e.g., especially as in this case after a long and fulfilling life / especially as in this case when death has come tragically/ prematurely/
_____], family and friends gather with sorrow in their hearts. At times when we must face death and loss, we need one another's company for understanding and support. Just to be together, to look into one another's faces, takes away some of our loneliness and draws our hearts together in the healing which we can offer one another. At such times, the various faiths that sustain us separately come together in a harmony that acts across all creeds and assures us of the permanence of human goodness and hope.

So we have gathered here today in grief and sorrow, but we have also gathered to celebrate a life. We have come together to give thanks that we knew this [appropriate adjective, e.g., gentle/ caring/ fine/ decent/
_____] person, to express our gratitude for the days and years we were able to share with [her/him]. We are here to remember and memorialize a [describe the outstanding personal qualities of the deceased with several adjectives, e.g., good / gentle/ caring/ loyal/
_____] life. By remembering the best of this person, by recalling some of [her/his] finest qualities, by honoring the principles, values, and dreams which guided [her/his] life, some of [name of deceased]'s enduring nobility flows into us, that we ourselves might be more noble in the days ahead.

[Or]

Let us be honest with death. Let us not pretend that it is less than it is. It is separation. It is sorrow. It is grief. But let us neither pretend that death is more than it is. It is not annihilation. As long as memory endures, [her/his] influence will be felt. It is not an end to love—humanity’s need for love from each of us is boundless. It is not an end to joy and laughter—nothing would less honor a [gentle/kind/vibrant/ other appropriate adjectives that describe the deceased could be substituted _____] soul than to make our lives drab in counterfeit respect. Let us be honest with death, for in that honesty we will understand [her/him] better and ourselves more deeply.

—*Source unknown*

Chalice or Candle Lighting

No one entering this world can ever escape sadness. Each in turn must bear burdens, though he or she be rich or poor, and in turn bid loved ones farewell as they set out upon life’s ventures. Each one must suffer that sad farewell when loved ones embark on the last voyage, and each in turn must take that final journey. But for those who make this life a pledge to the spirit, there comes the assurance of a victory that shall redeem life’s pain.

(Light candle or chalice.)

Though our spirit be but the feeble glow of a single flame, for the one who keeps it burning bravely to the end, death is not defeat. We light our [candle/chalice] today to honor the life and living of [name of deceased _____].

—*Robert Terry Weston (adapted)*

Benediction

We have dedicated this child,
And in so doing, we give thanks for the gift of life.
With each child we renew in our hearts our sense of wonder and joy. We commit ourselves to this child and to all children, to this world and to its betterment. Amen.

Chapter Three

Wedding Services

The following are distinctly different Unitarian Universalist wedding services. You may use them exactly as presented, or combine elements to create a service that meets the needs of each particular couple and situation. *Remember that a bracketed [] portion in the service indicates where choices are to be made.*

Every state and province has laws concerning who may and may not marry and who may or may not officiate at weddings, how a wedding license is obtained, and other requirements. If you reside in a place where only clergy and justices are allowed to certify a marriage, you, as a UU lay leader, can probably conduct a legal wedding by having an official person on hand to sign the license. **Before you conduct a wedding, you must check with the local authorities to ensure that you do not violate any laws.**

Many wedding couples wish to participate in planning the order, content, and style of the service, perhaps writing their own vows and adding favorite poetry and readings. In these cases, at least one planning meeting should be arranged well in advance of the wedding date to allow for adequate preparation time.

If the two individuals to be married come from differing faith traditions, the service may need to reflect this by including elements and readings from both heritages. Obviously, any religious service should strive to make everyone in attendance feel welcome and included.

A Memorial Service

Order of Service

Opening Words
Chalice/Candle Lighting
Address
Readings
Personal Reflections/Eulogy
Readings (*optional*)
Summation
Benediction

Opening Words

(Choose one of the following two options.)

For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:
A time to be born and a time to die;
A time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted;
A time to kill and a time to heal;
A time to break down and a time to build up;
A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together;
A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to seek and a time to lose;
A time to keep and a time to cast away;
A time to rend and a time to sew;
A time to keep silence and a time to speak;
A time to love and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace.
For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven.

—*Ecclesiastes, 3: 1-8*

Committal Services

Often (either in addition to a memorial service or funeral, or in its place) there is a request for a committal service. In cases where the body of the deceased is being buried, such a service is conducted at graveside just before interment. In cases where the body has been cremated, the service takes place where the ashes are to be scattered or buried. (Note: each state or province has its own laws about disposition of the remains; you must check to make sure you are not participating in an illegal activity.)

Committal services are usually brief, including a reading or two, a prayer, words of committal, and possibly a benediction. Materials included in the sample memorial service could be used. In cases where the committal is the only service being held, the service could be longer, with family and friends invited to share memories, thoughts, and readings or prayers before the words of committal and disposition of the remains. It usually helps to let those attending know in advance that there will be an opportunity for such sharing. Individuals can be encouraged to write down what they want to say, or at least to mentally organize their remarks ahead of time.

Wedding Service I

Order Of Service

Opening Words

Wedding Address

Blessings

Reading

Introduction to the Vows

Vows

Exchange of Ring/s

Reading

Pronouncement

Benediction

Opening Words

If life has meaning to us at all, it possesses it because of love. It is that which enshrines and ennobles our human experience. It is the basis for the peace of family and the peace of the peoples of the earth. The greatest gift bestowed upon humans is the gift not of demanding but of giving love between two persons.

—*Source unknown*

Wedding Address

In marriage, two persons turn to each other in search of a greater fulfillment than either can achieve alone. Marriage is a going forth, a bold step into the future; it is risking what we are for the sake of what we yet can be. Only in giving oneself and sharing with another can the mysterious process of growth take place. Only in loyalty and devotion bestowed upon another can that which is eternal in life emerge and be known. Two among us come now, in our presence, to declare their love and to be united in marriage.

Love is a living thing, waiting within each one of us for an awak-

Chapter Four

Memorial Services

What follows are two simple and complete memorial services and a committal service, any of which could be conducted without the involvement of clergy. While the services are reasonably straightforward, you will notice that there are quite a few choices and decisions to be made before the service. *[Remember that the bracketed [] portions in the service indicate where choices are to be made.]*

A memorial service requires substantial care and sensitivity to plan and conduct. As long as you remember that the purpose of the service is to minister to the loved ones, you can create a meaningful and effective service.

The element that requires the most attention is the Personal Reflections/Eulogy, which should be prepared carefully. Although a service can be planned without this personal element, generally a service is much more effective if such an individualized component is included.

Many Unitarian Universalist memorial services are greatly enriched when the service leader encourages congregational participation in this “remembering” section of the service, allowing a relaxed and quiet time for individuals to speak of memories and feelings about the deceased. If you did not know the person, it might be possible to get the family or friends of the deceased to write a remembrance/eulogy for you, based on their intimate knowledge. Or you might meet with them a day or two before the service and then write a eulogy based on what you learn, possibly including key phrases or quotations from the family and friends. In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, remarks in this section of the service are usually focused upon the legacy which the deceased person has left as an enduring presence in the lives of

Walt Whitman wrote:

“Listen! I will be honest with you. I do not offer the old smooth prizes, but offer rough new prizes. These are the days that must happen to you. You shall not heap up what is called riches, you shall scatter with lavish hand all that you earn or achieve. However sweet these laid-up stores, however convenient this dwelling, we cannot remain here. However shelter’d this port and however calm these waters, we must not anchor here. However welcome the hospitality that surrounds us, we are permitted to receive it but a little while. Come, I give you my hand! I give you my love more precious than money. I give you myself before preaching or law. Will you give me yourself? Will you come travel with me? Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?”

Introduction to the Vows

[First names of wedding couple _____], it is a great joy and pleasure for me to be standing here with you on this momentous day, sharing in your marriage ceremony, and witnessing to the life-long commitment you are making to one another this day.

I must remind you that the vows you are about to say to one another belong entirely to you. The words I speak have no magical powers, and nothing that I can say or do on this day can ultimately make your marriage endure with beauty, fidelity, and joy. Only you, by the integrity and diligence of your love, can make these vows last.

So it is not to lofty words, or institutions even, that we appeal at this hour of commitment; but rather to the resources which you two can draw from deep within yourselves...the deep well of human need, the need to live united and loving and complete before a broken and imperfect world. So will you now please join a hand each to each, and repeat your vows after me?

(Couple joins right hands.)

Vows

(Speak the wedding vows to each person to repeat, one line at a time.)

In reaffirming the relationship we have been building together,
I [_____]
_____]

to be no other than yourself.

Loving what I know of you,
trusting what I don't yet know,
with respect for your integrity
and faith in your abiding love for me,
through all our years,
and in all that life shall bring us,
I accept you as my [partner in marriage].
(Repeat vow for second person.)

[Or]

I take you [_____] to be my
[partner in marriage], loving you now and always.
I will love you when we are together and when we are apart,
when life is peaceful and when it is in disorder,
when I am proud of you and when I am disappointed in you.
I will honor your goals and dreams
and help you to fulfill them.

From my heart I will seek to be open and honest with you.
I say these things to you with the whole of my being.
(Repeat vow for second person.)

[Or]

In reaffirming the relationship we have been building together,
I [_____] now take you [_____] in
marriage.
Together in love,

[And/ or]

Let us conclude this ceremony with a Native American blessing:

May you feel no rain, for each of you will be shelter to the other.
May you feel no cold, for each of you will be warmth to the other.
May there be no loneliness for you.
Now you are two bodies, but there is one life before you.
Go now to your dwelling place, to enter into the days of your
togetherness.
And may your days be good, and long upon the earth.

—Adapted from the Apache by Kenneth Patton

Pronouncement

Whom love hath joined together let no one break asunder. For as much as you have consented to live together in marriage and have pledged yourselves to each other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving rings and by joining hands, I therefore pronounce you married.

(Couple may kiss.)

Think not that you have finished anything here today. This service is but the mark of a beginning. Today before all the world you have formally lighted the lamp of love. Keep it warm and bright with mutual concern. Replenish the source of its light with daily care, with gentleness and respect. Take it with you into all the highways and byways of life. Try it. But let it not burn dry with your indifference or flicker and grow dim through your carelessness. Care for it. Rejoice in it. Make it a light truly creative in your lives and in the larger life of which all of us are a part.

Benediction

(Use either or both.)

And, now, as you go out from this place together, and in love, may the blessings of those around you attend you and keep you—together always, in understanding, tenderness, and love. Amen.

to work and to share,
to grow and understand,
to discover a deeper, fuller life.
(Repeat vow for second person.)

[Or]

In reaffirming the relationship we have been building together, I take you to be my [partner in marriage],
to be the [parent] of my children,
to be the companion of my days.
We shall bear together
whatever sorrow and adversity life may lay upon us.
We shall share together
whatever joy and fulfillment
life may hold in store.
(Repeat vow for second person.)

Exchange of Rings

Love freely given has no giver and no receiver. You are each the giver and each the receiver. [_____] and [_____
_____], by the use of these rings you express, in visible form, the unbroken circle of your love, so that wherever you go, you may always return to your shared life together. May [this/these ring/s] always call to mind the freedom and power of this love.

[_____], as you place this ring on [_____
_____]'s finger, please repeat after me:

“I give you this ring...to wear upon your hand...as a symbol of our commitment and love.”
(If two rings are exchanged, repeat for second person.)

[Or]

Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux, has written:

“Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball and so are the stars. The wind in its greatest power whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a person is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves.”

—*Used with permission*

[_____], as you place this ring on [_____
_____]'s finger, please repeat after me:

“I give you this ring ... to wear upon your hand ... as a symbol of our commitment and love.”

(If two rings are exchanged, repeat for second person.)

Reading

Anne Morrow Lindberg has written:

“When you love someone, you do not love them all the time, in exactly the same way, from moment to moment. It is an impossibility, it is even a lie to pretend to. And yet this is exactly what most of us demand. We have so little faith in the ebb and flow of life, of love, of relationships. We leap at the flow of the tide and resist in terror its ebb. We are afraid it will never return. We insist on permanency, on duration, on continuity; when the only continuity possible in life, as in love, is in growth, in fluidity, in freedom, in the sense that the dancers are free, barely touching as they pass, but partners in the same pattern.

“The only real security is not in owning or possessing, not in de-

“I, [first name of partner #2 _____], take you, [first name of partner #1 _____], to be my [wife/ husband/ partner in marriage], to have and to hold, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and respect, [from this day forward/ so long as we both shall live].”

Exchange Of Rings

What symbols do you have of these vows that you take?

(Rings are placed in leader's hand.)

These rings are of gold; so may your love for each other be the most precious possession of your lives. A ring constitutes a circle; may it symbolize the never-ending loyalty and honor that shall encompass and bind your new relationship.

(Partner #1 says:) “With the giving of this ring, I thee wed.”

(Partner #2 says:) “With the giving of this ring, I thee wed.”

Wedding Prayer

Let us pray: [Eternal Spirit/ Creative Source of life/ Loving God], in the midst of which we live and move and have our being: in thy name are we met together, to witness and to bless the union of these two lives. May it be in their hearts and in their powers, faithfully to keep the pledges of this day. May they be a blessing and comfort, each to the other, sharers of each other's sorrows, helpers of each other in all the chances and changes of the world. May they grow in understanding and love, and may faithfulness to the good of each become the unfailing virtue of them both. Amen.

Over the horizon of the future, there come toward you even now hours of brightness and hours of shadow, for such is the nature of life.

(Pick up the goblet of sweet wine.)

Life has, indeed, many bright and happy experiences, of which this sweet wine is a token. As you drink of it together, may it serve as a symbol of the joy that comes with loving and sharing, and may your happiness be tempered with gratitude and modesty and a bountiful sympathy for those who are less fortunate than you.

(Pass goblet to partner #1, who drinks and passes it to partner #2, who drinks and passes it back to you. Return goblet to table and pick up goblet of bitter wine.)

But when hardship and sorrow and disappointment come, of which this bitter wine is a token, may you care enough to help one another with courage and compassion, neither one blaming the other for folly or failure, or regretting the obligation of marriage to share and bear together the chances and changes of a life deeply lived.

(Goblet is passed as above.)

Exchange of Vows

(Read the vows in phrases of appropriate length.)

Now, join your right hands and repeat after me:

“I, [first name of partner #1 _____], take you, [first name of partner #2 _____], to be my [wife/ husband/ partner in marriage], to have and to hold, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and respect, [from this day forward/ so long as we both shall live].”

manding or expecting, not in hoping even. Security in a relationship lies neither in looking back to what it was in nostalgia, nor forward to what it might be in dread or anticipation, but living in the present relationship and accepting it as it is now. For relationships too must be like islands. One must accept them for what they are here and now, within their limits. Islands, surrounded and interrupted by the sea, and continually visited and abandoned by the tides. One must accept the security of the winged life, of the ebb and flow, of intermittency.”

Pronouncement

[_____] and [_____
_____], you have told me, and all of your friends and family members who have gathered here to share this moment of joy with you, that you deeply love one another, and wish to live together now seeking an ever-richer, ever-deeper relationship. You have formed your own union—in friendship, in respect for one another, and in love—and it is therefore now my joyful task to pronounce you married.

(Couple may kiss.)

Benediction

And now, may that glory which rests on all who love, rest upon you, and bless you and keep you, and fill you with happiness and a gracious spirit. And, despite all changes of time and fortune, may all that is noble and lovely and true abound in your hearts, and abide with you, and give you strength in all your days together.

[Or]

[_____] and [_____
_____], believe in what is yours, believe in who you are, believe in the richness and the power of what lies in the depths you share. And go now in great happiness assured that all our hearts go with you.

Wedding Service II

This service should be conducted with the couple facing a small table or a fireplace. On the table or fireplace mantel, two goblets of wine should be placed attractively, along with an arrangement of flowers, if desired. In one goblet there should be a small amount of sweet wine and in the other, bitter or dry wine.

Order of Service

Opening Words

Wine Ceremony

Exchange of Vows

Exchange of Rings

Wedding Prayer

Pronouncement

Benediction

Opening Words

Dear Friends: We have come together in the presence of this company to join these two in marriage, which is an institution made creative by the loving care of people of all time.

It is, therefore, not to be entered into lightly or unadvisedly, but reverently, intelligently, soberly. Into this closest of relationships you two come to be joined by a ceremony which, to be true, must be but a symbol of something inner and real—a sacred union of hearts and lives—which religion may bless and the state make legal, but which neither can create or annul. You two, only, may do that.

[First name of partner #1], will you have [first name of partner #2] to be your partner in marriage? Will you love [him/her], respect [him/her], comfort and keep [him/her]? Will you share with [him/her] in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in joy, [so long as you both shall live/ from this day forward]?

I will.

[First name of partner #2], will you have [first name of partner #1] to be your partner in marriage? Will you love [him/her], respect [him/her], comfort and keep [him/her]? Will you share with [him/her] in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in joy, [so long as you both shall live/ from this day forward]?

I will.

(Optional)

Who pledges the good will of the families of this couple?

(Parents answer as appropriate:) [I/we] do.

Wine Ceremony

You were born together, and together you shall be....

But let there be spaces in your togetherness,

And let the winds of the heavens dance between you.

Love one another, but make not a bond of love:...

Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone,

Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.

Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping....

And stand together yet not too near together:

For the pillars of the temple stand apart,

And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.

—Kahlil Gibran

It is the goal of marriage to achieve a blending of hearts and lives—but let there be spaces in your new life together, so that each may encourage and nurture the individual growth of the other. Even so, your separate lives will become one life; your separate homes, one home; your separate fortunes, one fortune.