



## To Be a Blessing

BY SUE MAGIDSON, AFFILIATED COMMUNITY MINISTER, UU CHURCH OF BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

I love my job. I love driving to the hospital each morning, having *no* idea of what will happen that day—who I'll meet, what I'll do, whether there will be triumphs or tragedies, joy or heart-break, setbacks, small signs of progress or holding patterns. The one thing I do know is that there will be opportunities to be of service.

Actually, that's true for each of us, every day—we never really know what will happen, even when we think we do—and there's usually something we can do to help someone else. However, that sense of mystery and possibility is heightened in a hospital setting.

I love all the different people I get to meet, especially folks I would never get to know otherwise. And since everyone responds a little bit differently to crisis, I learn a lot about people, particularly where they turn in times of trouble.

For many of them, religion helps, and I get to learn how. My job is to serve people of every religion and no religion, people whose beliefs are similar to mine and folks whose beliefs are radically different.

As you might guess, hospital chaplaincy meshes beautifully with my calling to Unitarian Universalist ministry. Our UU principles guide and ground my work, starting with our beloved first principle—the commitment to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of *every* person.

As hospital chaplain, I serve everyone who steps onto hospital grounds—patients, visitors, and staff—from the custodians to the CEO. I love how spiritual care flattens the hospital hierarchy. To a chaplain, everyone is precious and worthy, regardless of beliefs, finances, language, education, country of origin, skin color, age, gender, class, sexuality, and so on.

But while spiritual care uplifts the divine spark in everyone, hospital work reveals painful societal inequities, like diseases that could be prevented or better managed if everyone had full access to the care they need and the resources to take care of their bodies. These situations break my heart every day.

Unitarian Universalism's second principle calls us to justice, equity, and compassion. At the hospital, I look for ways to counter injustice directly, such as advocating for folks whose voices are muted or educating staff members about cultural differences. As chaplain, though, I bring another gift that counters injustice. By listening without judgment, by affirming each person's experience, I let them know that they matter to me, that ultimately we are all equally precious.

I'm frequently asked how I can spend my days surrounded by so much pain and suffering. One answer is that the work itself comes with many gifts—moments of deep connection and meaning, joy and laughter and gratitude amidst the tears, and ample opportunities to make a difference.

Another answer is a prayer that welled up in me a few years ago. I say it every morning as I drive to the hospital. It goes like this:

*May I be what's needed.*

*May I be of service.*

*May I be a blessing.*

These simple words remind me of my deepest intentions. They help me return to

# Quest

Vol. LXXII, No 10

November 2017

You were not just  
blessed for yourself,  
you were blessed to be a  
blessing to others.  
—Ifeanyi Enoch  
Onuoha



A monthly for religious liberals

### THINKING ABOUT BLESSING

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center when I get thrown. You'll notice that the three sentences overlap—each offers a slightly different framing. Here's what I hear:

*May I be what's needed.*

It's not about me. This is not about being brilliant or wise or creative. This is about being what's needed. Sometimes that's a warm blanket, an extra pillow, a box of tissues, a glass of water. Sometimes it's sitting silently, holding a hand. Sometimes it's singing. Sometimes it's listening for a long time without saying much. Sometimes it's coming back later.

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### May I watch and listen and sense what's needed in this moment by this person.

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May I be what's needed. May I watch and listen and sense what's needed in this moment by this person. May I honor that and respond as I'm able.

*May I be of service.*

May I go beyond what's needed to discern what else might be helpful to this person at this time. Service might involve religious support—arranging communion, bringing electric Shabbat candles, finding a prayer rug. Service might involve taking a risk—asking a difficult question, speaking the unspoken, naming the unnamable. Service might be helping a patient or family think through a difficult decision. And it might be much more basic, such as tracking down some apple juice or helping a patient cut up his food.

May I be what's needed. May I be of service. And then the line that inspired this sermon:

*May I be a blessing.*

A blessing. Seeking to be a blessing shifts something for me. There's something concrete about being what's needed, being of service. But striving to be a blessing makes room for mys-

tery, for serendipity and synchronicity, for grace. Desiring to be a blessing reminds me that I'm not in control. It encourages me to hold things a little more lightly.

Being a blessing is an act of openness, an act of love. It connects me to something larger, to that interdependent web of existence in which things can unfold in uncanny and unpredictable ways.

Sometimes being a blessing depends on being in the right place at the right time, and usually, in chaplaincy at least, that's not about planning. I can't tell you how many times folks have said to me, "You came just when I needed you most," leaving me flabbergasted and humbled, having *no* idea how that happened.

Being a blessing doesn't necessarily involve *doing* anything. There are times when I sit with grieving families in silence while they do the praying, while they take care of each other. Sometimes I wonder if anyone notices I'm there, but, invariably, when it's time to leave, the families shower me with hugs and *thank yous* and I'm left wondering, "What exactly did I *do*?"

Very simply, I was there—available if they needed something, willing to be with them in their anguish, letting them know that their grief mattered.

Whether my actions are actually a blessing is something I may never know, but striving to be a blessing reminds me of when others have been a blessing for me, when a small, simple action has made a world of difference.

Now, I'm using the word blessing as if we all know what it means, and I'm guessing that for some of you, blessing is a zingy sort of word—a little too religious or touchy-feely or amorphous, and certainly the word blessing *is* just a bit vague. My analytical side would love to give you a clear, unambiguous definition. But the more I tried to determine what makes something a blessing, the more slippery the definition became. Unfortunately, religious

words are like that sometimes.

I'd like to say that a blessing is in the eye of the beholder, but even that's problematic. So many blessings slide by without our noticing. Others come in disguise. Who knew, for example, that a rare infection that landed me in the hospital for a week back in 1997 would become a blessing in retrospect? Without that experience, I'd have no idea what it's like to be a hospital patient—the lack of control, the boredom, the fear, the endless waiting.

In fact, many of the hardest times in my life have become blessings to my ministry by giving me compassion and insight as to what might help others. Blessings come in so many forms.

And so, with the imperfect and unsatisfying assumption that we *might* know a blessing when we see it, I ask you:

What have been some of the blessings in your life?

Where did they come from? From someone you know? From a stranger? From a situation?

How have *you* been a blessing—to loved ones, to family and friends, to those you don't know?

How has your work been a blessing—both what you do and how you do it? How do you bless your communities? How do you bless the world?

What would it be like to walk through life asking yourself, "How can I be a blessing today?"

Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker, who served for many years as the president of Starr King School for the Ministry, encourages us to "choose to bless the world." In *Blessing the World: What Can Save Us Now*, she writes, "The purpose of life... is to discover the joy or well-being that simultaneously pleases us and blesses our neighbor. Every act we commit is a contribution to the world; the question is whether our actions will be a blessing or a curse.

The basic question of life is not,

*Continued on page 3*



## Bless One Another

BY DAN SCHATZ,  
MINISTER, UNITARIAN  
CONGREGATION OF WEST  
CHESTER, PENNSYLVANIA

What does it mean to bless one another? Is it an invitation to the divine? Is it an expression of good wishes? Is a blessing something we say or something we do—a religious ritual or a way of living our lives?

For years, blessings baffled me, and I think other people could tell.

Two decades ago I was one of an inter-faith group of summer chaplain interns at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center. One of the things I appreciated about our group was the effort everyone made to respect each other's diverse religious paths—even my Unitarian Universalist humanism, about which I was a lot more

*Magidson continued from page 2*

*What do I want? but rather, What do I want to give?"*

We cannot *always* be a blessing. Sometimes we need to just be. Sometimes the blessing is letting others care for us. Sometimes, miraculously, there's a blessing in simply being our messy, weary, grumpy, painfully human selves. Blessings are not about perfection, and they come in many unexpected forms.

That said, what would it be like to walk through your life with the intention of being a blessing? What would it be like, in the words of the Starr King School chalice lighting, to move in the world "accepting your gifts with grace and gratitude and using them to bless the world in the spirit of love"?

*May you be what's needed.  
May you be of service.  
May you be a blessing. ■*

defensive and absolutist at 23 than I am today. Then, one day, it happened.

I sneezed.

Sister Antonia, the Franciscan nun in our group, automatically said, "Bless you!" and then she blanched. "Oh," she said, "I mean, if that's okay." I told her I was happy to receive blessings in whatever theology anybody wanted to give them, and in that moment I made a commitment to myself to relax more about religious language. By the end of that summer, I had learned to pray with patients in the words they needed to hear. Appreciating the act of blessing became part of my growth in religion and ministry.

It's such a simple thing to say. "Bless you." But I used to think that outside of a sneeze, it was something only a priest might do, bestowing some kind of divine authority and intention that I didn't believe worked that way. Saying "Bless you" felt very awkward, until I came to learn how important the act of blessing can be, and that there doesn't have to be anything magical about it.

When we bless children in our congregations as part of a dedication service, our blessing is both a prayer and a promise. We pray that they will grow healthy and wise and full of wonder, that they will know hope and peace in their lives, that they will be comfortable within themselves. We promise to love them, to care for them, and to pay attention to their needs, not only as parents but as a community.

That is what a blessing should be—a prayer and a promise.

I believe that Unitarian Universalists are thirsty for blessing.

A blessing is food for the soul—a way of nurturing one another that goes beyond platitudes and becomes the way that we choose to live. We might not always use the word, but when we reach toward one another with an offering of care, support, or simply the presence of our hearts, we become blessings in each other's lives. ■

I once served a congregation that made a point to send valentines to members who had been ill, or who were homebound or in nursing facilities. I will never forget the member who told me, with tears in her eyes, how much difference that simple act made in her life. "Thank you," she said. "It was incredibly nice to be thought of." She talked about how hard it is to be away from the community which means so much to her, and how the cards brought connection and hope. It was a blessing.

We are thirsty for blessings.

When we are grieving, when we are going through a difficult time, or wrestling with a hard decision, the blessings we find in community and the blessings we give to one another, bring us courage and give us hope, keeping us grounded in reality and in the goodness of life.

We are thirsty for blessings.

When we are filled with joy, there are few blessings greater than to be part of a community in which we can share the fullness of our hearts, knowing that there are people who care, and who walk with us in celebration as much as in sorrow.

We are thirsty for blessings, and so I ask of you this: Bless one another. Whatever form your blessing might take, whether you use the word or simply bless with your actions, be a blessing to the people around you.

Listen to them. Let your love and compassion come through. Stand with one another, a presence without judgment, a comfort and an encouragement. You don't need to solve all of the problems or make everything better; that is probably beyond your power. Just bless one another. And mean it.

This is the simplest way that I know to live a spirit-filled life, and you may never know the impact of your simple blessing—your words, your patience, your moment of remembering and caring for another soul. Bless one another. ■

## A Father's Blessing

BY EDWARD FROST,  
SENIOR MINISTER  
EMERITUS, AT-  
LANTA, GEORGIA

I have not forgotten—nor will I forget until all memory fades—the day, the moment, in



which my father and I parted. We did not put an ocean between us, or a country. He did not disown me, nor I him. We parted as a cloud passed between our hearts, shadowing what we had been, shadowing what we would be henceforth.

At this time I was barely fifteen years old. We had come recently to America from England. There, he and I had been pals, chums, co-conspirators in fictions and fantasies. For as long as I could remember, each Sunday my father and I would set out together for tramps down village lanes, across meadows, through churches, churchyards, and burial grounds. We explored ruined castles, fought off Norman invaders, Vikings, Black Knights. We rowed the rivers curling through the countryside, rose in and out of locks, scrambled up and down brambled banks, slipped reverently past fallen abbeys.

This was who we were before the cloud passed between. Wizard and trusting apprentice. Storyteller and credulous listener. Teacher and student. All this we brought to America and, for a while, attempted to nurture, though there were no hedgerows or ruined abbeys, no hairy Vikings, and certainly no sniveling Normans. Each Sunday, as in former times, we set out on a quest to keep us as we were, to hold back my years.

Then, that Sunday morning, my father came out to where I shuffled in dread in the gravel drive. I didn't know how much damage I was about to do, but I

knew I was about to cast us away. He came to me, sandwiches for us, and a thermos in his bag, and asked if I was ready to go. "Gee, Dad," I said, "A couple of my friends are picking me up and we're going to go over to the baseball game." "Oh, alright," he said, though his face could not hide "Goodbye" as he turned and walked away, the golden cord unraveling as he went.

We were not the same again, of course. We continued to grow apart in the years that followed until, at his death—now many years ago—it seemed we were barely acquainted. My adolescence was beyond him. He watched, as if helpless, as I tried out various foolish and dangerous ways to become what passed for manliness. As I continued in my education, pursued my own dreams and ambitions, I left his knowledge and his understanding far behind.

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That's what redemption is...giving the past hope where the past itself held none.

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He had left school at the age of twelve to help support his mother and sister after his father gave up and ran away. He educated himself and was often mistaken for an Oxford man. But my journey left him by the wayside—as, so he felt, had life and all hope and possibility; and there he rooted in anger, regret and self-destruction.

He was a man who, had he had a fathering father, had he not been born into abject poverty, had it not been for this or that, for fate or happenstance—had all that beside-the-point not been so, he would have been a man whom all the world knew by name. But the sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons from generation unto generation.

I never met my father's father. To the best of my recollection, my father never mentioned him. Certainly, there had

been no blessing there, no approval, encouragement, nothing conducive to happiness or welfare. And so my father strove to succeed without blessing, and always success eluded him. And with that, he failed to bless his son.

And so, again and again, the sins of the fathers, visited upon the sons, from generation unto generation.

Well, a sad story, mine—and maybe yours. But I'll claim some hope of redemption. In a poem called, "Thanks, Robert Frost," David Ray writes:

*Do you have hope for the future?  
someone asked Robert Frost, toward  
the end.*

*Yes, and even for the past, he replied,  
that it will turn out to have been all  
right  
for what it was....*

That's what redemption is. At any rate, that's a way of thinking about what redemption is: giving the past hope where the past itself held none.

How do we redeem the past? Surely what was, was? No. What was always is, blessing the present or reliving its sin generation after generation. The only hope for breaking the cycle, for our children's sake, is for us to redeem the past, which is to forgive it all, to bless it—a thing conducive to happiness or welfare.

For whatever else it may have been worth, I have made some beginning in doing that for myself, saying: *Yes he did those things, did not do those things, and he suffered this at the feet of his father—bless him, too—and carried all he suffered into the present, as do we all.*

And it is not too late for me, still, in frequent tears and much puzzlement, still putting it all together and finding it not too late, now even past fathering and into grandfatherly-age, it is not too late to bless my children, seek their blessing, wishing blessings on all the generations to come.

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## Calling on Wholeness

BY ELEA KEMLER, MINISTER, FIRST PARISH CHURCH OF GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS



I decided early on in my work as a minister that if someone asked me to bless something, I would say yes whenever humanly possible. That is what ministers do, I thought. We bless things. And I have blessed many things over the years: houses and barns and art studios, babies and elders and pregnant bellies. And of course I have blessed people who are dying and people who have died and people who are very much alive.

One of the best blessings I ever did was for the women's biker club of central Massachusetts, who called themselves with pride and humor Dykes on Bykes. Apparently it is fairly common for Catholic priests to do a blessing of the bikes for motorcycle clubs but this was 15 or 18 years ago in a small country town, and the local priest, whom they asked first, did not feel it was the greatest of ideas for him to bless the Dykes on Bykes.

Luckily, he sent them to talk to our congregation instead. They roared up to the church one Sunday afternoon just toward the end of coffee hour, about 25 women on motorcycles and it was very, very loud and very, very cool. The congregation came outside and two of the teenagers carefully put holy water on the handlebars of each of the bikes. I asked each rider to tell me quietly what she felt she especially needed a blessing for and they were such tender things—healing from breast cancer, the repair of broken relationships, the well-being of families.

The whole congregation said a blessing that was something about *May you ride safely and may there be joy and freedom and gladness in your journeying*, and the women started up their bikes again and roared off down the street. It was pretty great.

I have never once regretted the decision to offer blessings when asked. But the other thing I have learned, and this is probably even more important, is that I don't bless alone. All of us have the capacity to bless. It is something all of us can do.

I think my congregation is perhaps a little unusual in this tendency of ours to bless so much. I remember how our sabbatical minister was a little surprised to discover, when I showed her around my office, that I keep little vials of holy water in my desk drawer. Other colleagues have been surprised to learn I carry a vial of holy water in my bag at all times. *What do you do with it?* they ask me.

I give it away. I give it to people who are struggling or facing surgery or some other hard thing so that they can give themselves a blessing when they need it. Pour it on their heads or rub it on their hurt places or sprinkle it on their door steps or sleeping children. Or maybe just keep it and carry it around to help them remember they are loved or not alone or whatever they need to remember. I know someone who keeps his in his pocket most days. He just likes to have it there.

So what, then, does it mean to offer a blessing, to be a blessing?

To bless something or someone is to invoke its wholeness, to help remind the person or thing you are blessing of its essence, its sacredness, its beauty, and to help remind yourself of that, too. Blessing does not fix anything. It is not a cure. I always remind people of this when the animal blessing services comes around and people want the blessing to help make their dog not be afraid of thunder or to stop barking every time the door bell rings.

A blessing does not fix us. It does not instill health or well-being or strength. Instead, it reminds us that those things are already there, within us. A blessing is a way to remember strength, to invoke the capacity to grow and heal and

change, to resist giving up. That is all a blessing is, but that is so much.

The poet, theologian and former priest John O'Donohue wrote extensively about blessing. In his book *To Bless the Space Between Us* he talks about the need to recover what he called the lost art of blessing. He says:

*When a blessing is invoked, it changes the atmosphere. Some of the plenitude flows into our hearts from the invisible neighborhood of loving kindness. In the light of blessing, a person or situation becomes illuminated in a completely new way. In a dead wall a new window opens, in a dense darkness a path starts to glimmer, and into a broken heart healing falls like morning dew . . . Let us begin to learn to bless one another. Whenever you give a blessing, a blessing returns to enfold you.*

So much of the blessing we do is to help people cross these crucial thresholds, to help us navigate new experiences and the strange and sometimes difficult passages of every human life. This is a lot of what religious community is for—to offer each other blessings, to remind each other of strength in times of illness and recovery, birth and death, grief and joy.

Think about the last blessing you offered someone, perhaps without even knowing you did so. Was it the blessing of touch, the blessing of cooking and serving food, the blessing of folding the clean laundry? Think about the last time you felt blessed—when you felt taken into the care of someone's heart. Think about how it feels to be blessed. Think about the blessings you can give today, right now.

I offer you these words of blessing by John O'Donohue for this moment:

*May I live this day  
Compassionate of heart  
Clear in word  
Gracious in awareness  
Courageous in thought  
Generous in love. ■*



## From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY  
SENIOR MINISTER,  
CHURCH OF THE  
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Blessings exist independently of time, in the land of the eternal. I know this most concretely in my garden. Of course today's flowers, in all of their red and orange and green and pink radiance, are blessings, each one uniquely beautiful in color, shape and growth pattern. Each one blessing me with the joy of the moment, reminding me that today, right now, is the pinnacle of time.

But tomorrow's flowers are also blessings. In early spring, when the fall-blooming asters are tiny emerging bits of green, I am already feeling the blessing they will bring when the other flowers have gone by. In October they will be bright purple and pink, the only visible color in the garden. In winter, as I look out at the dead husks of Echinacea and other summer perennials poking out through the snow, I receive the blessing both of the present offerings of seed and resting place to birds, and their promise of a future. That promise is a blessing in and of itself.

Daily, I also receive the blessings of the past. Food in the freezer and canned on the shelf from what was once blooming. Photos and memories of last year's garden as I begin to plan what I will do differently in the coming season. Tales to tell other gardeners of successes and failures.

The garden is my most concrete way to realize the eternity of blessings, but certainly not the only way. Lately, I have created a photo gallery I am enjoying on my wall which has baby pictures of my great grandmother, my grandmother, my mother, me and my child. This reminder that we were all babies once helps me to stay centered

in the moment in which I live. It helps me to receive the blessings of the past, the present and the future.

As the years have gone by since the deaths of both of my parents, I have continued to receive blessings from them. Insights from past conversations can still reshape my understanding of who they were. Present day politics cause me to reconsider times which they lived through, and call up instructions by considering what they did when their own times were hard.

A few years ago, my child found a letter that my father had written to my mother when he was courting her, from the early 1940s. My 18-year-old child was so inspired by the letter, which consisted of nothing more urgent than recounting the news from the local newspaper with witty observations and speculations, that this letter inspired a similar habit of letter writing to a loved one far away, which is still going on today! How delightful that my father's influence could continue, blessing both my child and the recipients of countless new letters.

As an empty nester, I decided my life would be much more joyful with young children around, so I took in a housemate with two young children. They are a blessing to me right now, like the bright flowers in summer, as together we experience the magic of children's views of daily life. They also bless my future, whether or not I will even know them when they are adults. I still call to mind children I knew as a teacher or as a religious educator, who are well into adulthood by now and likely have children of their own, remembering funny or insightful things that they said as if it just happened today. I am blessed by those memories, blessed by my participation in the endless flow of time.

As Unitarian Universalists, we talk about a living tradition. Every year at our General Assembly, as we mark the life transitions of ministers—

ordinations, retirements, deaths—we are honoring the blessings of an eternal faith. It is a faith that transcends time, and yet whose primary focus is always on the pinnacle of now. We are celebrating the blessings which we inherit, and work with, and pass on to the next generations, knowing that they will continue to pass them on to generations we will never live to see.

There is deep comfort for me in being part of that living tradition, doing my small part to make the tradition as much of a blessing as possible for as many people as possible. I am blessed by sharing this tradition with you as we envision the future together. ■

## Nominating Committee Seeks Leaders

FROM THE CLF NOMINATING COMMITTEE:  
DENNY DAVIDOFF, JOSEPH SANTOS-LYONS,  
CATHY CHANG, CHARLES DU MOND

The CLF's Nominating Committee seeks members to run for positions beginning **June 2018**:

- Board of Directors—three for 3-year terms
- Treasurer—for a 1-year term
- Clerk—for a 1-year term
- Nominating Committee—one for a 3-year term

Board members set CLF policy and approve the budget. The Board meets in Boston or other US cities twice annually, and periodically by conference calls. Nominating Committee members put forth nominations for the Board.

For more information about the Board and Nominating Committee, visit [www.questformeaning.org/clfuu/about/](http://www.questformeaning.org/clfuu/about/). You may nominate yourself or another CLF member for any of these positions. Please contact the CLF office at [nominating@clfuu.org](mailto:nominating@clfuu.org) by **January 15, 2018**.

## REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



Lots of people, UU and otherwise, say a blessing before eating together. And for Thanksgiving it's even more common. After all, that's what the holiday is about—giving thanks. That's what the blessing before meals does.

But if you think about it, that's kind of a funny use of the word *blessing*. We give a blessing, or say a blessing, but usually when we talk about something being a blessing, we mean the thing itself, not words about it. Having good food to eat is a blessing. Gathering with friends and family is a blessing. Having a place to sit down together is a blessing. Stories that we share together are a blessing.

A blessing is something good that we don't necessarily deserve. It's a gift—maybe from a particular person, or maybe from the world in general. Beautiful sunny days with a light cool breeze are a blessing, as are trees that fill with light as their leaves turn color.

When we say a blessing, really what we are doing is acknowledging the blessing that is already there. We don't make a blessing, we find a blessing, and share our thanks for it.

That urge to name our blessings and give thanks for them seems to be built into who we are as human beings. It's a part of pretty much any religious tradition you can name. The Pilgrims celebrating the survival of a scrap of their original number were steeped in a tradition of giving thanks to God, and the Wampanoag who enabled their survival offered prayer and sacred tobacco in gratitude for the gifts of the earth.

In the Jewish tradition there are official blessings for pretty much anything you can imagine. There are bless-

ings for the candles and bread and wine that mark the celebration of the Sabbath. But there are also blessings for getting up in the morning or seeing a wise person or finishing a book. All of these blessings begin "Praised are you eternal God, King of the Universe..." Every blessing connects the ordinary things of the world to the sacred and eternal.

Saying the blessings is known in Hebrew as a *mitzvah*. *Mitzvah* is kind of a tricky word. The word itself means blessing. But it also means a responsibility or obligation. The blessings, the prayers themselves, are *mitzvot* (plural). But also, saying the prayers is a *mitzvah*. Doing a kindness for someone, or helping your parents or giving to charity is a *mitzvah*. You are expected to be a blessing to the world. You are blessed by being a blessing to the world. It's all woven together.

I'm guessing it was a similar understanding of the intertwined nature of being blessed and being a blessing that moved the Wampanoag to help the strangers who arrived on their shores. Like so many indigenous people, the Wampanoag religion is centered in a deep awareness of "all my relations"—an understanding that all beings of the earth thrive only in reciprocal relationship, each sharing their gifts as they gratefully receive the gifts of others that enable them to live.

Recognizing our blessings, giving thanks for our blessings, fulfilling the obligation to be a blessing, is all interwoven, as inseparable as the web of life.

If your family sits down to bless a Thanksgiving meal, perhaps you might want to do it by inviting each person at the table to share by saying:

*I give thanks for the blessing of \_\_\_\_\_ . I try to be a blessing by \_\_\_\_\_ .*

Perhaps you want to pair them: *I give thanks for the blessing of my family. I try to be a blessing by teaching my younger brother. I give thanks for the blessing of food. I try to be a blessing by growing tomatoes. Or each half of the blessing could stand on its own: I give thanks for the blessing of air. I try to be a blessing by really listening to people who talk to me. I give thanks for the blessing of water. I try to be a blessing by calling my senator.*

There are no right or wrong elements to this blessing. Each person knows best what they love and what they give. But there are ways to live in the world that are better than other ways. It's true that we can choose lives that ignore the gifts that surround us and pretend that everything is owed to us, while we ourselves owe nothing. There are plenty of people who seem to live that way. But it doesn't work.

Oh, it might work for them in some sense of the word. They might have lots of stuff, even fame to go with their fortune. But this way of living breaks the world—it shatters our connections and steals from the vulnerable. It dishonors and degrades the earth until the earth's gifts have all been taken and nothing is left.

If we all are going to survive—if we are to thrive and be whole—then we need to exist in the middle of a tangled web of blessings given and received, so interwoven that we might not even be able to tell which is which.

May you be a blessing.  
May you be blessed.



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Church of the Larger Fellowship  
Unitarian Universalist

24 Farnsworth Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02210-1409 USA

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**Did You Know**

That the CLF's Worthy Now website offers education and opportunities for those involved in prison ministry? Check it out at [worthynow.org](http://worthynow.org)

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## Buddy

BY JOHN, CLF MEMBER INCARCERATED IN OKLAHOMA

She arrived early Monday morning: homeless, forlorn-looking, carried by the maintenance worker who had found her. By afternoon, she had perked up and was attentive and active.

In fact, she had become comfortable enough that it seemed she *liked* being held, but that may have been because of the air conditioning and her lack of feathers. Still she would nestle down in my cupped hand and go to sleep.

By evening, she was exploring her new surroundings energetically, scurrying around the room, exercising all her muscles. Her appetite bordered on ravenous.

When darkness fell, and she settled in for the night—in my left shoe—the world seemed at peace. Apparently, that's the way she died: peacefully during the night. There was no indication of any problems when she nestled herself into my shoe, and I checked on her every time I awoke.

Few will miss this awkward, ragged-looking, not-yet-fledged baby starling. But I will.

Buddy was loved for a day, if only by me. But that's more than some beings on this planet get. And she brought joy to several people in that short time. I suspect that her mother grieves her missing child. I know I do. But I also know that I was blessed by the little time that our lives touched. I hope she was as well. ■

