

Welcome to the New Quest



AISHA HAUSER, MSW, CREML
*Lead Ministry Team,
Church of the Larger
Fellowship*

The Church of the Larger Fellowship is a vessel for change. We are continually evolving and adapting as we learn more about how we can best serve our congregants, parishioners, and faith community as a whole. We allow ourselves to reshape in ways that will make us able to serve the movement of Unitarian Universalism better. From funding innovative ministry to finding new ways to embody the ministerial search process, to increasing the resources we put into our Prison Ministry Network, we continue to build on a foundation of progressive and bold leadership as a model for how Unitarian Universalism can thrive while centering liberation, justice, and love.

As we embarked on this journey of learning and change together, we noticed that *Quest*, our monthly print publication, was not serving all of our readers as well as it could have. We saw that not all voices were being heard, ministered to, and given the platform to speak to their experience. That's why you might notice that this issue is different. You will read reflections from our members, see opportunities to respond to thinking prompts, have the chance to interact with activities on the pages, and even vote on important church business. Our vision is to create a monthly publication that adds value

to your life and connects you to your church. A magazine that is interactive, relevant, and made by and for the community who reads it.

We are inviting you, the reader, to submit reflections on a range of ideas and topics. Topics you could write about:

- Why do you love the CLF?
- Why are you a Unitarian Universalist?
- How do you put your faith into action?
- What theological and spiritual questions do you grapple with?
- How can we more intentionally minister to and with CLF Worthy Now Prison Ministry members?

Email submissions to editors@clfuu.org or mail them to the Church of the Larger Fellowship; 24 Farnsworth St. Boston, MA 02210.

We know that not everyone can access our online resources. This is especially true for CLF members in prison. We hope that between the pages of *Quest Monthly*, you find a place that connects you to your Unitarian Universalist faith. Wherever you are, however you are reading this, and whenever you get this, know that it was created with you in mind—the marginalized, the lonely, the left out, the little bit different. Whoever you are, you are welcome here.

We hope you enjoy this inaugural issue of the new *Quest Monthly*. We made it just for you. ■

Quest

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*This issue
was made
for you*

in this issue

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Black Lives Matter vs. All Lives Matter



REV. DR. MICHAEL TINO

Lead Ministry Team,
Church of the
Larger Fellowship

Since the bricks-and-mortar congregation I serve first affirmed that Black Lives Matter and hung a banner with those words, we have had a steady stream of push-back to that phrase. Most of the people who object do so in anonymous letters and phone calls, and most of them argue that we should affirm instead that “all lives matter.” This is the public response I wrote to those people. Perhaps you, too, will find this helpful.

Of course all lives matter to us. Respect for the inherent worth and dignity of every person is the very first principle of Unitarian Universalism. And yet, all lives are not equally threatened by violence in our society. To simply state that “all lives matter” ignores the very real inequities faced by many.

It is easy to issue a blanket condemnation of all violence. It is harder to realize that a good deal of that violence is tied to systems and institutions that must be changed or dismantled.

It is easy to say that all relationships should be free of violence. It is harder to understand that the victims of domestic violence are overwhelmingly



PHOTO BY KON KARAMELAS ON UNSPLASH

women, and that the misogyny in our society contributes to every blow.

It is easy to say that all children are precious. It is harder to understand that LGBTQ+ youth are given such negative messages about their self-worth that they are six times more likely than straight or cisgender youth to attempt suicide.

It is easy to say that we value a diverse society with people from all nations and ethnicities. It is harder to understand the anti-immigrant bigotry behind calls to separate and isolate poorer, browner schools filled with children of immigrants from wealthier (and mostly white) ones.

It is also easy to say that no one should be shot dead for a broken taillight. It is harder to understand that systemic racism leads us to a reality where unarmed Black men are seven times more likely than unarmed white men to be killed by police in a traffic stop.

I do not blame individual officers for this. I would imagine that there are very few police officers who signed up for their jobs with the explicit intent to perpetuate the racism built into our society. And yet, once you look at the reality of policing in this country, it's clear that is overwhelmingly what is happening. The white supremacy baked into our society is endemic also in institutions given power and weapons by our state.

“Black Lives Matter” is a declaration that an emergency exists, not a statement that we value one race more than another. The emergency is that the lives of our Black siblings are being taken at an alarming rate in a society that systematically devalues them. The killing must stop. The dehumanization must stop.

All lives cannot matter until Black lives matter. ■

Unitarian Universalism Out Loud



TANNER LINDEN

*CLF Public Relations
& Outreach Manager*

I believe that our job as Unitarian Universalists is to love loudly. Louder than the hate in the world. Louder than the brokenness, the despair, and the darkness. We have to love so loud that everything else sounds like white-noise. This is my style of Unitarian Universalism. This is what draws me to this work. I want to be a part of a ministry that calls us to unleash a bold, fearless, and brave kind of love—a courageous love.

Growing up, I could never do Unitarian Universalism subtly. It just wasn't my style. Even when I was really little, I have such distinct memories of 6-year-old me in 1st or 2nd grade telling all my classmates that "my church was the coolest church ever."

That passion and vigor never really went away. In middle school, I was practically obsessed with drawing chalices on everything. I would doodle on my arms, my shoes, assignments, and a million other things. In high school, I started to figure out what it meant to be a faith leader. I served on committees at my home congregation (which is like a right of passage for any UU, right?), I became an active leader in the youth community, and had the opportunity to do some really amazing work with really incredible religious leaders.

At age 16, I served on the Unitarian Universalist Association's Board of Trustees. Seriously, I could not do Unitarian Universalism subtly. It was just not my style.

This is the call that led me to become a religious professional and

eventually led me to the Church of the Larger Fellowship. When I heard about the mission and vision of this community, I could not turn away.

I've recently joined the church full-time, my job, in this new role, is to help people find and connect to the Church of the Larger Fellowship. Wherever they are, however they are, whoever they are. I am here to welcome them—to welcome you—to our church.

I'm living my 6-year-old self's dream. It is literally my job to show people the tremendous power of Unitarian Universalism. If we haven't already, I hope that we cross paths, I am so excited to serve this congregation in this role, and I know that together we will love so loudly that the whole world will know who we are. ■

learn more about membership

We are so glad that so many people are receiving and loving *Quest Monthly*. If you are not yet a member of the Church of the Larger Fellowship, please reach out to us to discuss whether church membership may be the right fit for you or your family. The CLF is a vibrant and growing congregation where over 2,400 adult members and hundreds of children and youth share the mission of building a global spiritual community. It would be an honor to formally welcome you into our faith family.

Learn more about becoming a free-world member at clfuu.org/join. You may also email us at clf@clfuu.org or call us at 617-948-6150.

If you are currently incarcerated, send a letter to CLF Worthy Now; 24 Farnsworth St. Boston MA 02210, and we will reply with more information about what's included in membership and how to join.

In the Labyrinth

REV. DR. MICHAEL TINO

*Lead Ministry Team,
Church of the Larger Fellowship*

“*Darling, the body is a guest house;
Every morning, someone new
arrives.*”

— JALAL AD-DIN RUMI

I do not espouse the theology that “everything happens for a reason.” I simply just don’t believe that. I don’t believe that pain and sorrow in our lives is deserved, even if it is a part of the universal human condition.

I don’t believe that suffering is redemptive or that God (or any other larger purpose) calls us to endure it. Too much damage has been done to people’s lives because of the belief that passively accepting pain and suffering purifies our souls and makes us worthy in the eyes of the divine. Way too much damage.

I do, however, believe that the hardships of our life can be opportunities for spiritual growth. To paraphrase Rumi, 13th century Persian mystic and poet, sometimes sorrow is a guest that sweeps our house clean so that joy may enter. Listening to our pain and learning from it is not the same as letting it take us over. Of course, we have to learn how to encourage the guests of sorrow, malice, and meanness to move on when they’ve overstayed their welcome.

The practice of moving through a labyrinth is very much a process of

opening ourselves to feeling whatever is present for us, learning from them, and then releasing those things. You begin the process with an open mind—sometimes with a question, sometimes with an ache in your heart, sometimes with uncertainty, but always with an open mind.

As you make your way through the winding pathway towards the center, you must pay attention. To the lines. To the twists and turns. To lose that attention is to get lost in the labyrinth—it is the only way you can get lost, actually, since it’s just one pathway.

And keeping that attention with an open mind allows in the guests. Some of them—like the guests of joy and companionship and community—are ones we want. Some of them—grief, sadness, despair—are ones we didn’t invite but have to learn from anyway.

And then you get to the center.

In the center of the labyrinth is a chance to pause. A chance to sit with the guests that have come into your soul during your journey. A chance to listen to what they have to tell you. And a chance to make peace with the fact that they’re visiting you.

After whatever time you need to do this, you make your way out, following the same, solitary, serpentine path. The way out requires the same focus as the way in. And that focus signals to our guests that it is time for some of them to move on. I have found that moving through a labyrinth on a regular basis is a clearing,

cleansing, and balancing ritual for my spirit.

The finger labyrinth included in this issue of *Quest* can be a spiritual practice you use anywhere you can have a piece of paper. Rather than walk or roll through a large labyrinth set on the ground, trace the line with your finger. The intention is the same. The practice is the same. I hope our *Quest* labyrinth allows you some measure of balance in your spiritual life. ■

► How to use a Finger Labyrinth

- 1) If you can, try to find a quiet spot where you can sit down and put the labyrinth on a flat surface.
- 2) Sit still and quietly until you can focus just on the labyrinth. If you have the option, you could try ringing a chime, playing calming music, or humming a single note.
- 3) Start with your finger where the path opens to the outside of the labyrinth. As slowly and carefully as you can, trace your finger over the white path, until you get to the open space in the center of the labyrinth. Take your time; it can be hard to keep your place on the path.
- 4) If you wish, when you are tracing your finger along the path, you can try to focus your mind on thanks, regret or hope. Or, allow your mind to find its own focus for your meditation.
- 5) Pause when you get to the center of the labyrinth. When you’re ready, follow the same path back out. How did it feel to go on this journey?



On Balance

JOHN DAVID *CLF Member,
Incarcerated in Texas*

On the subject of balance: many would imagine it as peace and harmony pervading throughout the sphere of life. A balance of nature, a balance of power among nations, an ordered and balanced household or community.

But balance is an ideal that never is the actual reality of the world and of our personal lives. Because the only even-leveling that could contain equilibrium would be total cessation. The antipode of vital and viable life.

Stability is what most actually conceptualize as a state of balance. Harmony as being under our control. But stability is transitory; life and the cosmic order are dynamic evolving changing through growth and decay. And never

will there be control enough to bring about desired, even the needed harmonious balance. The smallest degree of un-levelness becomes the cumulative chain of progressive flux and upset.

Better than balance is *resilience*, imbalance and discord are the norm of existence. Our ability to persevere and to thrive intact is all an individual can hope to attain; to be a constant to the state of an ever changing and fragmenting milieu. ■

What's in VUU?



CHRISTINA RIVERA

*Lead Ministry Team,
Church of the
Larger Fellowship*

Since 2013 the VUU has been the weekly online talk show hosted by the CLF. It is recorded and broadcast live on Thursdays at noon EST. In 2020 we celebrated our 300th episode! We have a lively live viewership as well as the option to view it later as a podcast or on YouTube. In its initial formation its guests and hosts were generally ordained UU clergy people talking about topics of interest. Seven years later, what is the view of the VUU?

Today's VUU brings together UU and UU-adjacent guests and topics viewed through an anti-oppression, anti-racist lens. The hosts are now an eclectic mix of CLF staff and volunteers who come from all corners of our faith community.



I would love for more CLF members with internet access to tune into the VUU. As the new Lead Ministry Team gets a clearer picture of the landscape of the CLF, we are looking at ways to integrate the CLF ministry as a whole. This includes understanding how the VUU can feed into a larger cohesive program for ministry. In future, we may preview a topic on the VUU that we'll go deeper into during Sunday Service, or vice versa. Or perhaps you'll find a covenant group that will watch and discuss a show together. Or a guest from the VUU will take us deeper into their ministry via a workshop.

What won't change on the VUU? Well, our "well known" intro segment will always be our take on our local weather just to give you a taste of where we sit. And we'll always be looking to bring you the UU Round-up of that week's noteworthy UU News. But most importantly we'll still be looking out for topics and guests that help us all go deeper into our UU faith and help us all get free. So consider this your personal invitation to join us this Thursday or via podcast, if you're able to. We'd love to see you soon! ■

The Power of Words on Paper



REV. JENNIFER JOHNSON
CLF Learning Fellow

I've spent the first few months of my service with the Worthy Now prison ministry amidst large stacks of paper. My desktop is continually piled high with pen pal applications and sheet upon sheet of responses to our faith formation courses. In this way I've been getting to know the incarcerated members of the CLF. I've been struck by the profound power of the simple medium of words on paper. Through your words I've caught glimpses of your hearts and spirits, your curiosity and wisdom, your courage and resilience.

As a kid I always had my nose in a book. I loved how words on paper could take me to distant places and long ago times. I loved that I could get to know characters, real and imagined, far outside the borders of my small town. Words on paper are powerful.

As I got older, I came to realize that words on paper are indeed powerful, but that their power can be used both for good and for evil. Across history, humans have invested words on paper with the power to delight *and* to denigrate; to confer rights *and* to deny them; to emancipate and to incarcerate. In the US, arbiters of power continue to abuse words on paper to institutionalize racism and enforce white supremacy. While visionary writers, especially queer and BIPOC movement leaders, are using words to map pathways to healing and justice.

As we re-imagine *Quest*, the signature publication of the Church of the Larger Fellowship, we want to be ever mindful that words can both heal and harm. We want to ensure that the words we put on *this* paper are in the service of Love and Liberation.

To that end, we would like to hear from you. What kind of words would you like to read in these pages? *Whose* words would you like to encounter here? What words would be supportive of your emotional, intellectual, and spiritual journeys? What type of words will help us to build faithful community together? In order to successfully re-imagine *Quest*, we need your perspective. Please take a few minutes to answer the questions at the bottom of this page and mail us back your response.

We look forward to your words. ■

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

Each month, we will offer a question or two for reflection based on the idea explored in this column. You may wish to explore it individually or as part of a group discussion. Consider submitting your reflection response for possible inclusion in a future issue of Quest. To submit this reflection, you can tear off your answer and mail it back to us using the envelope included in the middle of this issue, or mail a longer reflection separately.

**When have words on paper been helpful or healing in your life?
When have they caused harm to you or someone you care about?**



Church of the Larger Fellowship
Unitarian Universalist

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VOTE TO ORDAIN ANTONIA

One of the unique privileges of a UU congregation is the decision to ordain ministers. Within our denomination, only congregations have the power to ordain ministers. We'd like to ask you to consider voting to co-ordain Antonia Bell-Delgado, CLF Senior Learning Fellow, as a UU minister.



ANTONIA BELL-DELGADO
(XE, XER, XERS)

We are holding a special online congregational meeting on February 28, 2021 at 7:30pm EST to vote to ordain Antonia. If you are a CLF member who is unable to attend this meeting (due to incarceration or other circumstances) and you would like to vote to ordain Antonia, please write your name and signature below, and mail this paper back to us by February 21, 2021.

I, _____,
FULL NAME

as a member of the Church of the Larger Fellowship,
hereby vote to ordain Antonia Bell-Delgado to Unitarian
Universalist ministry.

SIGNATURE

DATE