

# Our Call Against Denialism



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“Every disaster movie starts with the government ignoring a scientist” – social media meme, unknown origin

In times of collective stress in a society, people often turn to humor for relief. Social media has been full of pandemic-related memes for months, but the one above particularly hit home for me as both funny and naming a painful truth. The same meme could apply to both the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change; in both cases, so many people in the US and around the world deny a reality that mainstream scientists have confirmed over and over again. Our climate is really changing, and climate chaos is already harming marginalized communities all around the world. We know that more disaster is imminent if those in wealthy countries don't make drastic changes to the structures of our lives and economies, but in a lot of US political discourse, there is still 'disagreement' about something that is factual.

The COVID-19 pandemic is very much real, and it continues to rage on throughout the US with a devastating toll on already marginalized communities, especially those held in jails and prisons. There has been evidence for a long time that wearing masks works to slow its spread, and that this fast-moving virus could have been much more contained if people

in power acted quickly enough and believed what experts named.

There's a pattern here: on the whole, the US seems to be exceptionally good at denying reality, and having widespread rejection of truth and facts resulting in dangerous consequences.

One of the most recent distressing recent examples of this pattern was the attack on our nation's Capitol Building on January 6th, 2021. A group of armed insurrectionists, encouraged and supported by our former President, attempted to overthrow an election because of denialism. They have continued to deny that the presidential election was free and fair, despite overwhelming evidence that it was.

Our Unitarian Universalist faith continually calls us to examine what we think we know. We are called to reject denialism and embrace a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, as named in our fourth principle. I've always appreciated that the fourth principle particularly names that our search for truth and meaning in the world must both be free and *responsible*. Our faith espouses that revelation is not sealed, that the search for truth and meaning always continues. What does it mean to engage in an ongoing and responsible search for truth?

I believe in part that it means we must always keep in mind our responsibility to each other as we

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# Quest

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Each day  
we are invited  
to risk  
holy surrender  
to the call  
of life and love  
and liberation

REV. DEANNA VANDIVER

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# Our Work to Do

## The 8th Principle of Unitarian Universalism



ALI BELL-DELGADO

*Learning Fellow,  
Church of the  
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The proposed 8th principle of Unitarian

Universalism states: “We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.”

The 8th principle was conceived by Paula Cole Jones, a lifelong UU who believes that Unitarian Universalism needs to expand beyond our current seven principles to make space for true, deeply multicultural beloved community. She discussed and workshopped this idea with Bruce Pollack Johnson and others in their region, and the 8th principle was created. It has been formally adopted by a number of UU congregations, and some people are working for it to be adopted by the whole denomination.

A common response to this proposed principle is, “Why is it even important that we ‘affirm and promote’ any of that? Don’t we already do that? It seems easily summed up in the other principles.” Some say that it feels like we are lifting up one group of people,

and leaving others to think that they are less worthy, because about 400 years ago, their ancestors did something bad to the ancestors of others. In other words, some think: why can’t we just let it go and move forward?

I have heard this and more hurtful responses to the 8th principle. As a Black Unitarian Universalist, those responses mostly make me sad.

How do I even begin to be in community and talk about who I am and how I see the world when conversations about race are often so laden in shame, anger, bewilderment? We all seek to protect ourselves from feeling bad, and questioning that which causes discomfort can be a tool to shield ourselves from that feeling. Often, we (including myself) as UUs live in the ‘whys.’ We are a community of seekers. Perhaps it’s even built into our principles.

Yet only asking why allows us to disconnect our brains from our emotions—the perfect out. I am not saying that we should never ask why. Rather, we should not only ask why but also ask how, who, what, and when. Only then can we get a more holistic answer.

Read the 8th principle to yourself again. How does it feel in your body when you take in those words? Check in with yourself—what are you noticing? Track that. Now, how does it feel

in your body when you read just a tiny segment of my experience living as a UU? Track that, too. Are you surprised, or does this feel familiar or expected? I know that in my body, I have often felt discombobulated as I have struggled to build an understanding of this faith that has both created a space in which I can belong, and has also disregarded me, covertly asking me to live small to fit in.

I can’t live small. I have to live authentically, and in living authentically, I know that it is my job to offer love and compassion. It’s my job to speak my truth.

If we are to create a beloved community we need to know that everyone won’t agree on everything and that’s okay. It is in those times that we circle around each other to build a better community: a community in which we are all seen and valued.

The truth is that people of color are tired. We are so tired of holding the fragility of white people to be able to be in community with white people. We are already holding so much. I am asking white people to hold what is yours.

Conversely, from speaking to my white allies, I know that some white people are tired. They are tired of getting it wrong. They are tired of trying

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search for what is true. We have a responsibility to make sure our understanding of the world always takes into account the experiences of those who have been most targeted and oppressed throughout our history, including understanding how differently Black, brown, and white people experience this country.

After the January 6th attack, I saw many UUs express shock and anger on social media that the facts of the election were being denied by the insurrectionists. Though the magnitude of the facts being denied are particularly striking, to anyone who has experienced marginalization or listened deeply to those who have, the pattern of denialism was familiar. To white UUs in particular: I want to invite you to consider how you may have also participated in denialism



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at different points in your life. Has your culture taught you to listen only to one set of experiences, one set of facts? Have you ever questioned (or seen other white people question) the truths of people of color when they have named their experiences of racism and white supremacy?

Denialism is nothing new; it's baked into the history of white supremacy and the history of the US. As Unitarian Universalists, our faith calls us to something different, something more. We must continue to search for what is true, and to center our responsibility to each other in our search. ■

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### Our Work, continued from page 2

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to do the right thing and having it be the wrong thing. Some are even tired of being responsible for their siblings who are unwilling to do the work. Can you hold that, too?

Recently, a CLF member commented that they were sorry that they missed a recent worship service, and that it was probably one of the only services this year that can't be turned into shaming old white men. Ouch.

In response, I was reminded again of

our community. A community that holds the dichotomy of me, stumbling upon this racial aggression and of the person who posted it, who seems to feel so unsettled by the work of the UUA to eradicate white supremacy that they feel personally attacked. Then I thought about my kids who have been raised UU since birth. I thought of how even in their church home, they have inherited this dichotomy in the only faith they have ever known. This is a complexity that is lived in and through our congregations every day. How do we begin to heal this divide? How do my children and this person live in the

same space and both feel valued?

Some people believe that we already have that and nothing needs to be done. I hold them in compassion, too. I continue to draw the circle wide with the 8th principle, and I invite you to do the same. I invite you to do the work of understanding and accountably dismantling racism, because until we all do this work, we cannot be liberated. Until we all do this work, we cannot maintain safety in our congregations. Until we do this work, we cannot heal our denomination. No matter how difficult it is to do, we must do this work. ■

## Spirit Draw Near



REV. CYNTHIA LANDRUM

*Minister, First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA*

About eight years ago I started a meditation practice of drawing or doodling that I call “inklings” —as it gives glimpses both inward into one’s self and outward into connection with others, the earth, or the great unknown. I do this by putting ink to paper. For the first year, I focused on drawing chalices over and over again, which grounded this practice in Unitarian Universalism for me. At other times, I’ve drawn as a method of prayer or meditation, focused on other people or myself, to send energy for healing or comfort. The benefits of doing a drawing or doodling spiritual practice like this are a lot like the benefits of any spiritual practice. It calms me when

I’m anxious. It focuses me when I’m scattered. It connects me to my faith and to a sense of something larger. In times when the world feels out of control, it gives me a sense of order and places something small within my ability. And in a time of change, it gives grounding.

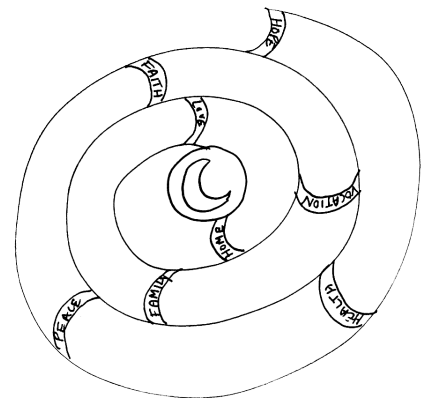
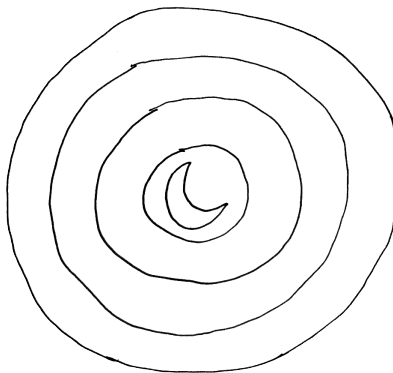
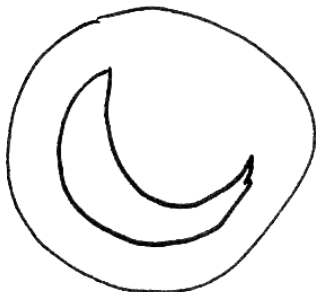
Here are the steps for a simple inkling practice of creating a prayer for the self. There are no mistakes, no wrong decisions, and no rules—every step is adaptable to your own wishes. This is not about creating great art. I will describe what works for me, but you will know what works for you and adapt it to fit into your location and available materials. It is also flexible in that it can be done with full attention or with divided attention. (And it is more socially acceptable to doodle in a meeting than to play a game on my phone!) The basic idea is to translate a spiritual practice—a prayer or meditation or worship

service or ritual—into a doodle format.

Spiritual practices often begin and end in very specific ways. In Unitarian Universalism, we often light a chalice. So I often begin the inkling process with creating a sense of the sacred around the drawing process—lighting a candle, saying some words, or just finding a special place. And then the process is about focusing thoughts on the self or another person or idea and doodling about it. I do this in a few easy steps.

First, I begin by drawing something on the page to represent the focus of the practice. This might be a circle or a written name, but in this instance I used a circle with a moon in it to represent myself. (“Cynthia” means goddess of the moon.) Then I draw a circle or spiral or petals around the circle. These will be spaces I will fill with the things I am praying for. Anything can

### an unfolding inkling



go in these spaces, but I often focus on things like love, hope, faith, family, health, friends, and home. And remember, none of these shapes have to be perfect. This is about the process, not the product.

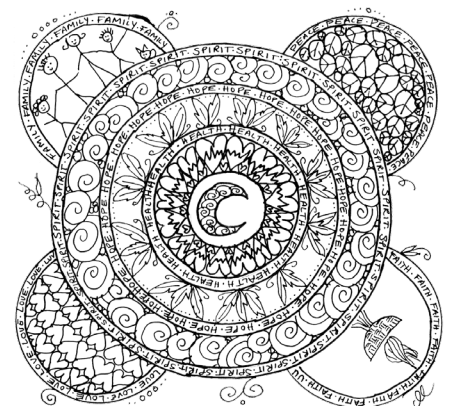
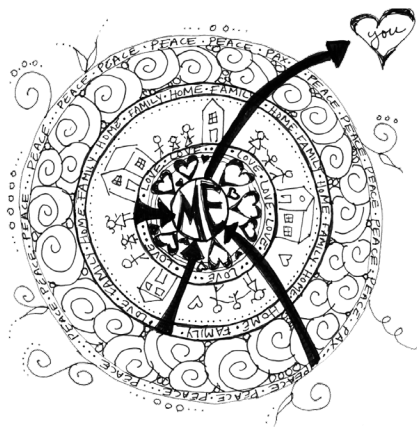
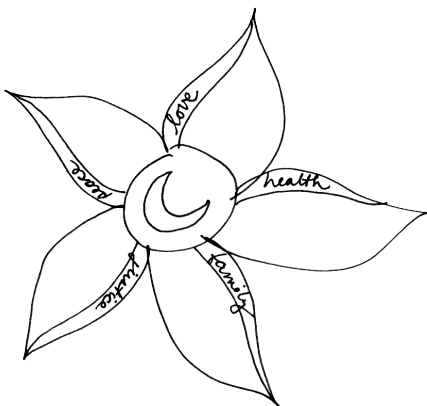
If this were a worship service, this next step would be the sermon—it's the heart of the practice. I fill in the spaces with words, patterns, or images, or a combination, to represent the things I want to increase in life, attract into my life, or just to contemplate more, like health or happiness or love. I like to use a combination of written words and patterns that are meaningful to me. I often draw spirals, a symbol connected to the Goddess, and to labyrinths, and to feminist spirituality. When thinking about hope, I draw feathers, from the line from Emily Dickinson, "Hope' is the thing with feathers / That perches in the soul." But what is most important here is to meditate or

find a sense of peace while drawing. When I draw a pattern I like, particularly simple ones, I can get lost in the repetition of it for a while. Conversely, Celtic knotwork is beautiful, but I'll think more about drawing the knot than about the meditation subject, and this is not about creating great art.

Every worship needs a closing, and so lastly, something I do if I'm still not feeling the energy flowing to me that I was hoping for, is to add arrows, directly linking the concepts to the symbol representing myself. The arrows represent the hoped-for flowing of energy. Or if I'm feeling full of good energy, I can direct an arrow out of the circle towards another person or the community or the world. And then, for a closing as I'm finishing the inking, I just add things around the edge and inside the patterns that I like to draw—spirals, dots, springs, leaves. Some people enjoy doing shading, or

adding color, and coloring can be its own spiritual practice. Remember, there are no rules to this!

I invite you to try this process and find ways to make it your own. And if you've enjoyed this process, you might find it interesting to delve into two methods that inspired me when I got started, Maria Thomas and Rick Roberts' "Zentangle" process, and *Praying in Color*, by Sybil MacBeth. There are a lot of different ways to create your own artistic spiritual practice, and it can be rewarding to try out different ideas and concepts. For me, putting patterns and shapes together to make a bigger image gives me just an inkling of how our 7th principle works—each little thing I do is a part of the larger picture, and each action we take contributes to the interdependent web. Through setting pen to paper, I hope that not only am I centering myself, I'm adding peace to the world. ■



## Risk love, beloveds

REV. DEANNA VANDIVER

*Unitarian Universalist minister*

Once upon a time  
I rejected the concept of surrender  
without hesitation or investigation  
Would not even risk  
thinking it (surrender, indeed!)

and yet...

when I remember the exquisite shade of red  
my white girl farmers tan turned  
the first time I began to give a speech  
in Mr. B' 9th grade Communications class  
and how I threw up in the girls' bathroom  
at the thought of having to speak publicly

when I think of how I went to the microphone  
at General Assembly  
my first one ever  
to speak in front of over a thousand delegates  
on behalf of those too young to vote  
my heart pounding so hard  
that the chalice on my necklace  
was bouncing on my chest

when I reflect on my ever-emerging ministry  
facilitating conversations with first dozens,

now thousands of folx  
organizing, teaching, preaching, creating,  
collaborating  
and always learning  
about white supremacy and systemic oppression  
and our faithful work  
on the journey of collective liberation

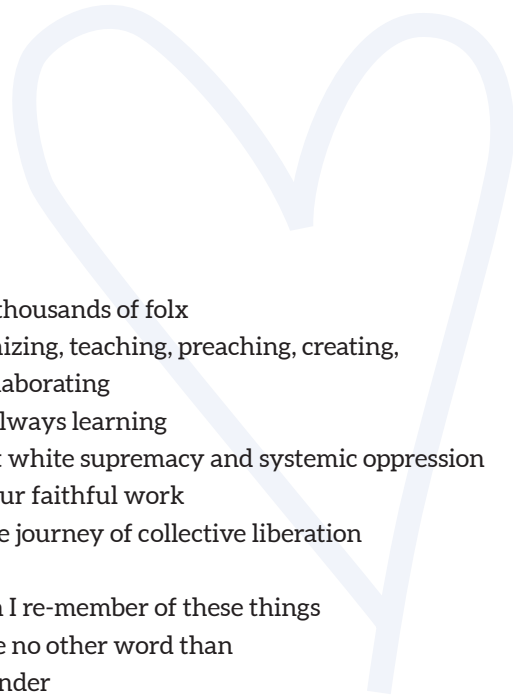
when I re-member of these things  
I have no other word than  
surrender

I surrender to the call  
of love and life and liberation  
of life and liberation and love  
of liberation and love and life  
again and again and again

Each day  
we are invited to risk  
holy surrender  
to the call of life and love and liberation.

and

we do not have to wait to be unafraid. ■



# Looking for a Way to Get Involved in Our Ministry?

## Become a Worthy Now Prison Ministry Pen Pal



TANNER LINDEN

*CLF Public Relations  
& Outreach Manager*

The Church of the Larger Fellowship is comprised of over 2500 individuals serving Unitarian Universalism—half of whom are currently incarcerated. As those of you reading this who are incarcerated know, most of our members in prison are new to Unitarian Universalism and learned about our church from friends or cellmates. With no access to the internet or Sunday services, people who are incarcerated can only learn about Unitarian Universalism from the mailings we send and letters exchanged with our staff and other Unitarian Universalists outside of prison.

Our Prison Ministry provides all people who participate an opportunity to live out our Unitarian Universalist values by connecting with a pen pal. At the Church of the Larger Fellowship, our message is that all of us are part of the interwoven fabric of the universe. We are deeply and undeniably connected. We acknowledge that while our behaviors can vary from loving to hate-filled acts of disruption and harm, our inherent worth remains unchanged. This is the foundation of our pen pal program.

For free-world pen pals (those who are not currently incarcerated): this



VIA WORTHYNOW.ORG

relationship has the power to bring you into proximity with the issues of those people who find themselves incarcerated. In turn, your heart may be renewed by witnessing the power of Unitarian Universalism present even in the most difficult of places. For members in prison: this relationship will bring you connection, community, and a deeper understanding of how others experience Unitarian Universalism.

The experience of being a pen pal can be transformative for everyone involved. If you are in the free world, you can learn more and apply at

**[worthynow.org/pen-pals](https://www.worthynow.org/pen-pals)**. If you are incarcerated and are already a CLF member, you can write to Beth at our Boston office (Worthy Now Prison Ministry, 24 Farnsworth St, Boston MA 02210) to ask for a pen pal application or check where you are in the matching process. Anyone who has completed our New UU course is eligible for a pen pal, though as many of you know, we currently have a waiting list for new matches and the process may take some time. We don't currently have enough free world pen pal applicants—so if you're not incarcerated and are interested in being a pen pal, please do apply! ■



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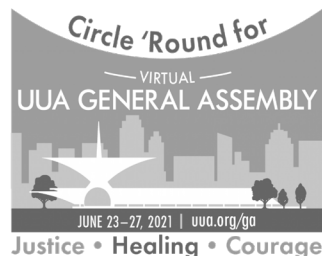
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**Would you like to represent the Church of the Larger Fellowship at Virtual General Assembly (GA) this summer?** The CLF is entitled to 22 delegates at the UUA's General Assembly, which will be held entirely online from June 23-27, 2021.

You will be able to attend online workshops, programs, and worship services. As a delegate you will be able to vote during General Sessions. General Sessions will be held from 1:30-4:30pm ET on 6/24-6/26 and 3:00-4:30pm ET on 6/27. Delegates should be able to be online to attend the majority of these General Sessions. CLF delegates vote their conscience on matters related to the denomination of Unitarian Universalism, and are responsible for their own expenses.

If you'd like to participate in GA 2021 in this role, please fill out the online application at [clfuu.org/delegate-application](http://clfuu.org/delegate-application). Visit the UUA's General Assembly website at [www.uua.org/ga](http://www.uua.org/ga) for details.