

Praying With Our Everything



REV. ERIN J. WALTER
Minister & Musician,
Austin, TX

I love the phrase
“praying with our feet.”

It often comes to mind for me in protests at the Texas Capitol, when I wait in line to vote, and perhaps most especially every Friday, when I lead my Zumba class, where we pray with our arms, our hips, our *everything*.

“What is your intention for this hour?” I ask folks Zooming in from around the world. “What are you dancing for today?”

On a recent morning, the answers included, “my 18-year wedding anniversary!” “another job interview,” and “seeing my grandkids again for the first time in COVID.” A woman in College Station, Texas, showed us her wrapped wrist and asked for healing prayers after surgery. A dancer in Canada requested the song “Best Friend” by Saweetie and shared sadness about a friend in hospice care.

We took deep breaths and held each other across the miles. Then we danced — for joy, hope, and grief. For the chance to move together as one, even in a time of isolation.

“Happiness ain’t something you sit back and you wait for

Feels so good to dance again”
—Selena Gomez, “Dance Again”

Since finding dance nine years ago, it has become my joy practice and a form of embodied prayer. I choose music and choreography to reflect Unitarian Universalist principles like interconnectedness, equity, and acceptance. Moving to the music of Lizzo, Kesha, and Gente de Zona, I am praying to the Spirit of Life — to summon the energy for another day of pandemic parenting, to feel in my hips and heart that I am enough. We are all enough.

Uruguayan journalist and novelist Eduardo Galeano wrote, “The church says: The body is a sin. Science says: The body is a machine. Advertising says: The body is a business. The body says: I am a fiesta.”

As UUs, I hope we can bring church and science into the body’s celebration (and do our best to ignore advertising altogether).

Lately, my own body and spirit have been telling me to slow down. I am feeling the impact of pandemic trauma, plus the natural effects of aging (and a decade of jumping up and down to Pitbull songs).

Praying, continued on page 3

Quest

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“Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul.”

MAHATMA GANDHI

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connect. deepen. act.

PRAYER

What does prayer look/feel/sound like to you?

ROBERT

CLF Member, incarcerated in MA

Little things, big things, anything; people pray for them. From the mundane, like to perhaps hit the lottery, to the serious, like for someone's life. (Though perhaps, for some, winning the lottery isn't mundane at all, but a serious need.)

It all cycles around to prayer. A want, a need, a desire, leading to hoping, wishing, possibly even begging, some greater power to hear you, to help you.

Do I pray? Probably not enough. I attend services, I meditate, I take part in my faith, and take it seriously. But praying? In here, it can be hard to do.

There's a mentality that pervades all here: avoid weakness, lest you be preyed upon. To pray, is, in a way, a surrendering yourself to another, to ask for help to do something.

Is that weakness? No, but in here, it can be viewed as such. So that energy hangs in the air, sapping you, putting you on edge.

But when I pray, it, in its way, helps and hurts. That surrendering lifts a weight off of you, it can be an emotional release, a reset of one's self, an



PHOTO BY PEDRO LIMA ON UNSPLASH

acknowledgment that you can't do it all on your own, and that everything will, in its time, be okay.

So pray. Not for me (though admittedly I wouldn't mind), but for you. For your world, big, little, whatever size it is. May it help you.

That is my prayer. ■

KEVIN

CLF member, incarcerated in VA

We all should know that though the look of prayer could be one on their knees with hands held upright, fingers straight up, palms together, prayer can look many different ways.

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Praying, continued from page 1

Thankfully, Zumba can be medium-impact or low, on your feet or in a chair or swimming pool. Sometimes just listening to the playlist is enough. When I forego a high-impact jump in favor of a grounded shimmy to protect my back, I am not failing my class – whose members range in age from elementary school to their 80s – but honoring the sacredness of all bodies.

Similarly, when my brain is tired and I forget a move, I try not to apologize (as I have been conditioned to do for the most human of mistakes). Even though I feel embarrassed on the inside, I throw my head back and laugh, improvising through the moments Richard Simmons used to call “accidental solos.” I remember that we are called to let go of perfectionism – a piece of dismantling white supremacy culture in ourselves and our institutions. I remind



PHOTO BY DYLAN NOLTE ON UNSPLASH

myself that we need these moments, to dance through discomfort and even embrace mistakes, having faith we will learn from them.

I remember the wise words of Cynthia Winton-Henry in her book,

Dance – The Sacred Art: “As much as you might want a ‘perfect’ spot in which to dance, it is really the other way around: You make the space around you holy when you dance.” ■

Prayer, continued from page 2

For me it is often sitting down anywhere – on the ground, in a chair, at a desk or table, with my hands held together. Of course it might be alone, or it could be with someone who needs a prayer more than me, as I say a prayer for them. I pray anywhere, anytime, needed or not, as a way to think about what the situation needs.

If I see a death happened in the news, I say a prayer for the family for strength, a prayer for the deceased. A flood – I say a prayer for support, goods, rescue. A fire – the same and more, to have shelter along with healing. A nice day with no huge troubles – a prayer of thanks and gratitude, with a prayer for more of these days.

The sound of prayer: it could be noisy, mildly busy with the hum of every

day life all around, or it could be complete silence, a prayer said or thought.

The feel: if nervous, anxious, or feeling the weight of the world on one's shoulders, then a prayer feels like relief. A great feeling of no burdens.

I'll end with a prayer of thanks and acknowledgment, for the gift of all that prayer is for me. ■

7 Centers 1

VYLET

CLF member, incarcerated in FL

Quiet as kept, be slow to speak
The tongue of death is death indeed
Let temperance and virtue be thy speech
Consider silence and still thy feet

Be thou fearless, feel not dismay
For thou art spirit to what is pain
Deep meditation shall make things clear
The weapons of war that thou should fear

Speak no lies, be not the fool
Boomerangs of deception bareth dark rife
If a word be uttered, let freedom reign
Sever the yoke and break every chain

If I be bound, may they be free
If I face danger, let them have peace
If I must die, let them live
Return I shall and with them sing

Divine decrees establish the link
Of things unseen, oh what of faith
This body clad of clay and dust
But I am greater, the creator's touch

Infused in soil, the morning star
A living soul, the lawful heart
Ponder the path thy foot is upon
Consider the workings thy hands have wrought

Be thou calm in every endeavor
And radiant as the sun
Forever-ever, forever and ever
I and my father are one



PHOTO BY DENIS DEGIOANNI ON UNSPLASH

Phoenix Rising

DALE

CLF members, incarcerated in TX

Looking at the night sky,
Staring at the galaxy,
Watching the Milky Way swirl.

Pondering things like,
"What is my purpose in life?"
While I'm watching the stars
Coalesces into a ball of fire
Brighter than the sun.

As I watch it forms
the face of God.

Burning white hot,
Igniting my world,
causing my fears and doubts
to flee, clearing my mind
and chasing away the shadows.

Enlightening.
Searing through me from the ashes
A phoenix arises,
stronger than before.

And as I look at the face of God,
I see me.



OCTOBER WALK

GARY

CLF member, incarcerated in NC

Endings

RICHARD

CLF member, incarcerated in NY

*Written in response to "End" by
Charlie, May 2020*

All things end.
It's people who refuse
to accept it.
We hold on with a death grip
to avoid the inevitable.
Nature knows that to live
all must also die,
to make room.
So is it really the "end"?

The sun still shines,
The rain still falls,
Grass and flowers and trees still grow.
And we all do what we can
in the time we've been given
To do the best we can
To make our being here worthwhile
Before our "end."

Calling on G.R.A.C.E.



ERIEN BABCOCK

Learning Fellow, Church of the Larger Fellowship

Note: a version of this article also appears in the Fall 2021 Worthy Now Newsletter

I am often asked by folks who don't have a belief structure how they can "connect" or reflect on their own growth. In response, I often recommend a modified version of the G.R.A.C.E. model, developed by Roshi Joan Halifax, as an ideal method. This can be done by anyone, and even better, requires only your own mind.

Here's an outline of the model:

G.R.A.C.E.

1. Gathering attention: focus, grounding, balance
 2. Recalling intention: the resource of motivation
 3. Attuning to self: What is helping or blocking your work
 4. Considering: what will serve
 5. Engaging: ethical enactment, then ending
- 1. Gather your attention:** In this step, you take the time to ready yourself to do your work. You

might pause, do breathing exercises, do sit-ups, or simply sit in silence: you need to know what you need to do. Invite yourself to be present, and use this moment of gathering to interrupt your assumptions and expectations. Allow yourself to relax and be ready.

- 2. Recall your intention:** Remember what you want your life to be about, and then set your intentions. Will you act with integrity and respect yourself? Will you open your heart and mind to the world of growth? This step can happen in a moment, or take a little time. Your motivation keeps you on track and connected to your highest values.

- 3. Attune by first checking in with yourself:** Notice what's going on in your own mind and body. Don't judge yourself: who you are is more than enough. This is an active process of inquiry. Open a space in which the encounter, questions, or time of reflection can unfold.

- 4. Consider what will really serve by being truly present letting insights arise:** As you deeply consider or reflect, this is the time when you let the insights... simply unfold or rise up. Then ask yourself: what will really serve here? Does it serve me only now, or will it serve me as I grow? Does

this protect me? Does this keep me from becoming a better me? This is the time to let go of what does not serve you. These steps are hard, and if it hurts, step back and consider that it might not be the time to work on that feeling or item.

- 5. Engage, enact ethically. Then end the interaction:**

Part 1: Engage and enact. Thinking of the previous step, hold on to what will serve you. What emerges is love and compassion for yourself, while offering a sustainable process. Create practical and actionable plans. These plans may not always be realized; but perhaps the goal is to simply see, and acknowledge, what can and can't be, with only love and compassion in your heart.

Part 2: End the interaction. Explicitly recognize when the encounter is over so that you can move cleanly to the next thing in your life. This recognition can be marked by attention to your out-breath, or simply coming back to your time and place. Acknowledge what transpired without being pulled back into the thoughts. Even if you feel you didn't progress very far, acknowledge that you did the work. This is the time to honor the work you are doing. ■

Upcoming Quest Themes

Do you have any thoughts related to these topics? All CLF members, both incarcerated and living in the free world, are welcome to submit entries for future issues of Quest. Write to us!

Due Date	Quest Monthly Theme	Response Question
November 1, 2021	December 2021 - Mystery	<i>What role does wonder and mystery play in your life?</i>
December 1, 2021	January 2022 - Invitation	<i>When have you felt invited and welcomed as your full self?</i>
January 1, 2022	February 2022 - Joy	<i>How do you practice and cultivate joy, especially when times are hard?</i>
February 1, 2022	March 2022 - Interdependence	<i>What does it mean to live interdependently?</i>
March 1, 2022	April 2022 - Memory	<i>How do honor memory in your life?</i>
April 1, 2022	May 2022 - Love	<i>What does love look/feel/sound like to you?</i>
May 1, 2022	June 2022 - Integrity	<i>What does integrity mean to you?</i>

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

In this section, we offer questions for reflection based on ideas explored in this issue. You may wish to explore it individually or as part of a group discussion. To submit your reflection for possible inclusion in a future issue of Quest, 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.

What role does prayer play in your life? Do you ever “pray with your everything”?

If you would like us to be able to publish or share your writing in the future, remember to include “You have permission to edit and publish my words” somewhere on your submission.



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