

# The Aunties Have Always Known



J. STAR ROCKERS  
UU Minister & Essayist

When I was a teenager, I loved Ralph Waldo Emerson, particularly his essay on self-reliance. *Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.* I repeated these words to myself often. Back then my family was large and everyone knew everyone's business. This was by design. As somewhat recent immigrants, we had learned how to keep our family safe. My mom and aunties would often prod me on the details of my life, cross-referencing information, verifying. I kept several diaries at that time, some of them in code, because I knew that if my diary was discovered it was getting read. Probably by more than one person.

All of this was done *for your own good* they liked to tell me, because they loved me. And I felt loved. I also felt stifled. I planned my escape to a mythical land of self-reliance, where one day I could do for myself alone and not worry what anyone else thought. Think Henry David Thoreau, but Doc Marten boots, drug addiction, and a basement apartment in downtown Seattle.

My journey of rebellious self-reliance indeed led me to some mythical places, but they were scary, too. And self-destructive. It took many years of sobriety for me to finally appreciate my family. During some of the worst days of my addiction, those same aunties helped my mom pull

me out of drug dens and bring me home. These are the kind of aunties who will drop everything when called, pick you up from anywhere you ask, and bring along a plate of samami and bread in case you're hungry. They arrive early to help and stay late to clean up and they never ask for anything in return. They know how to care for you because they know you. They take the time to get up in your business and ask.

The aunties know that Emerson's idea of self-reliance is a white supremacist lie. And it is always, ultimately, self-destructive. None of us, no matter who we are, relies on ourselves alone. Not even Thoreau, who was famously cared for by his aunties, too. The aunties have always known. We are all inherently interdependent, meaning mutually dependent, dependent on one another to survive. Without community care—without a multitude of generations leaning into that interdependence and making use of it—none of us will make it. The earth and its creatures can live no other way.

Emerson was wrong. It isn't self-reliance that secures the integrity of my mind, but self-care. And even that doesn't secure the integrity of my soul. For the integrity of my soul, I look to my community: my family, my ancestors, the earth, all the communities of people who claim me, and my body, as I claim myself.

[Aunties, continued on page 5](#)

## Quest

Vol. LXXVI, No 3

March 2022

*"All are caught  
in an inescapable  
network of  
mutuality, tied  
in a single garment  
of destiny.  
Whatever affects  
one directly,  
affects all  
indirectly."*

REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

### in this issue

THE AUNTIES HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN  
*J. Star Rockers*

INTERDEPENDENCE  
*Multiple authors*

FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES  
*Rev. Michael Tino*

A MESSAGE TO THE COMMUNITY  
*Reggie*

GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
REGISTRATION INFORMATION

# INTERDEPENDENCE

*What does it mean to live interdependently?*



PHOTO BY JACK ANSTEY ON UNSPLASH

## DESHAUN

*CLF Member, incarcerated in TX*

To be interdependent is to depend on one another. Living in a way that not only allows interaction and participation with others, but encourages and is founded on such principles.

It can be one living within a fully functioning community of like minded individuals, or simply a fellowship of individuals living separately operating as a collective.

Either way, it is an active union amongst individuals.

To live interdependently is to give, receive, and share what one has to offer with others. It is to allow yourself to rely on and trust others outside of yourself to meet needs in your life.

In a way, it is an acknowledgment through lifestyle choice that we as humankind are meant to live in connection with life outside ourselves.

It is a need that when not fulfilled, we are left with a feeling of incompleteness. Can anyone truly make the claim that they have met every need in their life without the assistance of anyone else?

When I have people around me as a part of my life whom I can depend and rely on, my life seems as though it flows more easily and is not as restricted. It opens up more and new possibilities in my life to explore. ■

# INTERDEPENDENCE

CARLOS

*CLF Member, incarcerated in VA*

“No man is an island.” This is a quote that most of us heard early in life, along with such aphorisms as, “two wrongs don’t make a right,” and “slow and steady wins the race.” But what does it actually mean, this figure of speech that brings to mind palm trees and coconuts?

I would like to think that the meaning of this saying lies under the fact that each of us, as individuals, as families, as communities even, live in ways that are interdependent with one another. By this I mean that each of us, whether intentionally or not, affect the lives of those around us — and it is up to each of us to decide whether it is for the good of others or not. In the same way that a soft

breeze can throw a flurry of oak leaves in the autumn, so can the simple act of a friendly gesture, a smile, or a sharp word affect the outcome of someone else’s day.

In this way, each of us is interdependent with everyone else — we are each free to act as we will, but with the knowledge that our actions affect others, not just ourselves. ■

JONATHAN

*CLF Member, incarcerated in WA*

I used to believe that the only way to be successful was to be independent, and that meant that I needed nobody’s opinions, teaching, or help. This worked well all the way up until about 4th grade. At that point, I wasn’t getting picked to play on anybody’s team. I was an outcast and alone.

I had to come up with a solution, and my solution was to ask for help. Knowing who to ask and when developed over time, and I created a network of friends, family and spiritual leaders that guide me interdependently.

Please don’t ever be afraid to ask for help. I believe that God intends for us to need each other! ■



PHOTO BY MARTIN WIDENKA ON UNSPLASH

# Forgive Us Our Trespasses



REV. DR. MICHAEL TINO  
*Lead Ministry Team,  
Church of the Larger  
Fellowship*

In April of 2019, I led a youth and adult delegation from the local congregation I serve on a service-learning trip to Pine Ridge, South Dakota. We en-

gaged in a year-long series of learning sessions about Native American history, with an emphasis on the history, spirituality, teachings, and practices of the Lakota people. Our time at Pine Ridge began with a tour of important sites on the reservation. I wrote this after returning from Wounded Knee, site of the 1890

massacre of nearly 300 Lakota people by the United States Army. I was reminded then that our interdependence transcends not only place but also time—and that in order to make a better future we must learn about and atone for the sins of the past. ■

## Forgive Us Our Trespasses

(Pine Ridge Reservation, 4.14.19)

How do you prepare  
to visit the site of genocide?  
Where the soil has been stained  
with the blood of innocents?

If you're Jewish, perhaps  
you find a small, smooth stone  
and carry it reverently  
to place on the grave of  
Lost Bird, infant survivor,  
kidnapped and sold and displayed  
like a trophy.  
We remember you, you might say.

I took a walk with friends  
up a steep, snowy hill  
to pray,  
to see the sun set,  
to feel close to the Earth.  
Along the muddy path  
the meadowlarks trilled and chirped

from their hidden nests  
amidst the dry grass  
blessing the journey  
with their song.

At Wounded Knee, we listened.  
First to an oral history of a people  
who survive, told  
with sage burning for purification,  
eyes closed in memory of  
the inherited trauma of generations.

And then,  
after the stories,  
to the meadowlarks.  
The lost birds singing  
through time  
across borders  
announcing the holiness  
of the ground on which we stood.



---

*Aunties, continued from page 1*

---

For the integrity of my soul, I build resilience by building relationships. I follow the example of my aunties, asking for help when I need it and showing up for others when they need me. Interdependence means we rely on one another. We depend upon each other. We actively care. It is the very opposite of self-reliance. And in this time of global pandemic and social revolution, it is the only way we will survive. ■

---

## INTERDEPENDENCE

ROBERT

*CLF Member, incarcerated in MA*

As COVID has shown us, we live in an interconnected world. One life affects another, distance no longer isolating each of us. Mind you, to combat this virus, we physically had to distance – which highlighted our need for physical connection, many not realizing until it was too late how much we depended upon each other, needed each other.

For we do need each other. We all have something to contribute. Some may say that those of us in prison don't do anything to help; I feel the same way about the talking heads that say this. It may be hard, and there are those that feel they don't



PHOTO BY ROBERT ANASCH ON UNSPLASH

owe anything to the greater world, but we do help, in our own way.

Beyond that dichotomy, looking all around, you see new and inventive ways for people to connect and stay connected. That human interaction cannot be stopped, for it is a part of our core, as essential as the air we breathe.

There are those that isolate, not in a medical sense, but a geopolitical one. They feel that they don't need

anyone, that caring for the hurt and downtrodden is not only beneath them, but it is their right to, well, tread on them. It's sad, for in the end, not even they gain from these actions.

For we all need each other. Everyone has something that they can do, something that is needed by another, not only to live, but to thrive. You can exist without others, but can only prosper with the support of others. ■

# A Message To The Community: A Letter From Prison

REGGIE

*CLF Member, incarcerated in PA*

I offer my condolences to the families who have lost  
loved ones  
And became victims to the violence

I offer my apologies for having been derelict in my duty  
and responsibility as a man  
In not being the guardian, educator, and leader my  
communities needed  
In order to be vital and life-affirming

I want to inform you that it is my goal to counteract  
the insanity of the destructive mindset  
And I do not embrace those who prey upon any people  
But particularly, my people

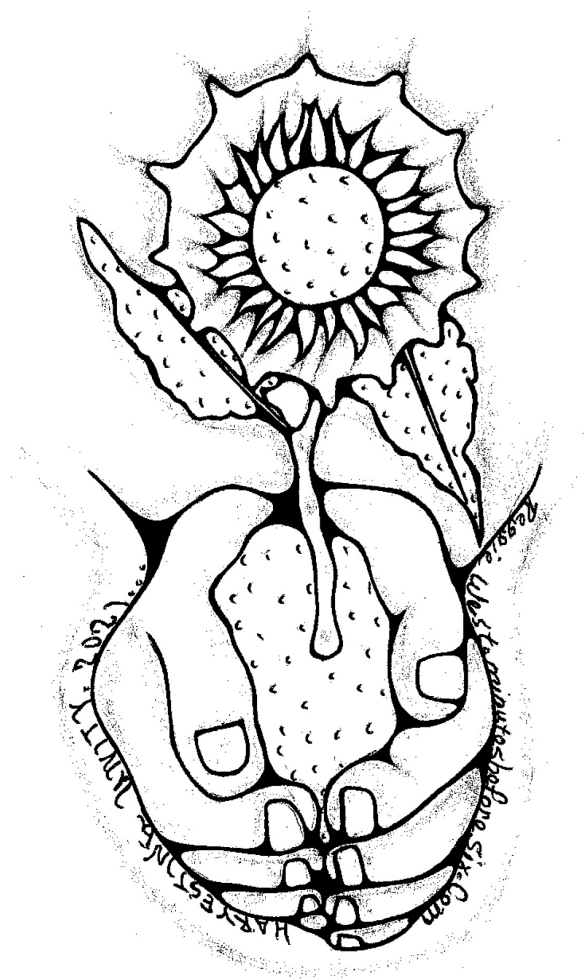
I want my voice to be heard:  
Let the violence, drug dealing, physical, and spiritual  
abuse of the communities stop

As a man, I want it to be known that I have come to  
value and recognize  
That the children need and deserve a safe and secure  
environment in which to grow and develop,  
Be educated, have access to equal opportunities to excel  
And become who the Creator intended them to be

I ask that everyone reading or hearing this looks at a child  
Whether at home, school, at play, in church, or mosque,  
and consider these words:

## **I am the African child**

The whole world awaits my coming, all the earth  
watches with interest  
To see what I shall become  
Civilization hangs in the balance; for what I am, the  
world of tomorrow will be



ARTWORK BY REGGIE

## **I am the African child**

You have brought me into this, about which I know  
nothing  
You hold in your hand my destiny  
You determine whether I shall succeed or fail  
Give me, I beg you, a world where I can walk tall and proud  
Train me, as is your duty unto me  
To love myself, and my people  
And to build and maintain a great nation  
It is I who proclaim

## **I am the African child**

The whole world awaits my coming, I shall not delay it  
For I too have a dream

*The February 2022 issue of Quest included information about 2021 General Assembly by error. Apologies for the mistake! Below is information about becoming a CLF delegate for the 2022 General Assembly.*



## UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

MULTIPLATFORM / PORTLAND • 2022

**Would you like to represent the Church of the Larger Fellowship at General Assembly (GA) this summer?** The CLF is entitled to 22 delegates at the UUA's General Assembly, which will be held both online and in-person in Portland, OR from June 22-26, 2022.

You will be able to attend online or in-person workshops, programs, and worship services. Proof of vaccination for COVID-19 is required to attend in person.

As a delegate you will be able to vote during General Sessions. General Sessions will be held from 9:30-12:30pm PT on 6/23-6/25 and 12:30-2:30pm PT on 6/26. Delegates should be able to be online or in person 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 2022 in this role, please fill out the online application at [clfu.org/delegate-application](https://clfu.org/delegate-application). Visit the UUA's General Assembly website at [www.uua.org/ga](https://www.uua.org/ga) for details.

## 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.*

**How do you practice interdependence in your life? How do you counter the white supremacist lie of self-reliance?**

*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.*



Church of the Larger Fellowship  
Unitarian Universalist

24 Farnsworth Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02210-1409 USA

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
BOSTON, MA  
PERMIT NO. 55362

You can read back issues of *Quest Monthly* or get electronic versions of the text to share with friends (and much more) at [questformeaning.org](http://questformeaning.org)

**Quest Monthly Editorial Team:** Aisha Hauser, *lead ministry team*, Rose Gallogly, *publications coordinator*, Lori Stone, *director of technology*, Tanner Linden, *public relations and outreach manager*, JeKaren Olaoya, *copyeditor*

**CLF and Worthy Now Staff:** Aisha Hauser, Christina Rivera, Michael Tino, *lead ministry team*; Jody Malloy, *executive director*; Lori Stone, *director of technology*; Tanner Linden, *public relations and outreach manager*; Beth Murray, *prison ministry administrator*, Judy DiCristofaro, *fiscal administrator*; Rose Gallogly, *publications coordinator*, Andrea Fiore, *webmaster*, Marin Smith, *data services coordinator*, Cir L'Bert, Jr, *prison ministry manager*

**Learning Fellows:** Dr. Althea Smith, Erien Babcock, Lecretia Williams

**Websites:** [clfuu.org](http://clfuu.org), [dailycompass.org](http://dailycompass.org), [worthynow.org](http://worthynow.org)

**Phone:** 800-231-3027 or 617-948-6150 **Email:** [clf@clfuu.org](mailto:clf@clfuu.org)

**CLF Jewelry at inSpirit, the UUA Book & Gift Shop, 800-215-9076**

**CLF Unitarian Universalist, 24 Farnsworth Street,  
Boston MA 02210-1409 USA**

Copyright 2021 Church of the Larger Fellowship. Generally, permission to reproduce items from *Quest Monthly* is granted, provided credit is given to the author and the CLF. ISSN 1070-244X

## 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.