

A Space Where There Is No Other



PAT HUMPHRIES
& SANDY O
of *Emma's Revolution*

*"Where do we find
that space of connecting,
of belonging. Really, that space
where there is no other."
— bell hooks*

Connection is a lifeline. To extend oneself, to belong to something larger. Inviting a conversation outside of one's head or examining an internal relationship, perhaps to bring it into a state of balance.

That internal state of balance is one of the underlying losses during the pandemic that is rising to the surface for some of us as we emerge—in whatever ways we do, don't or can't emerge—from these last three years. There's a yearning for a long-promised return to "normal" even when we know there is no normal and that what society has called "normal" was problematic, full of injustices and oppressive systems that continue to hurt so many of us.

Living through a time when our lives depended on our distance from one another and when breathing in the same space together could be deadly, some of us were able to question, "How can I possibly find safety and still have a sense of connection?" And some of us didn't have the ability or choice to be safely distanced. At no time in recent history have we been so in need of connection and

so uncertain about the means or the consequences of such contact.

Now, many of us are having to relearn how to connect and who to connect with. Even before we reach out to other people, we may have to go through a process of considering how connected or disconnected we are with ourselves. We're, at once, catching up with and reinventing our lives and the process can be overwhelming. Even in writing this, we are feeling the challenges of reintegrating into some kind of new rhythm. We are bridging our own gap between what was and what is now, who we were and who we are becoming to meet this new reality. And we've needed a lot of patience and compassion, trust and love, both for ourselves and for each other, so that we can help create whatever happens next, personally and societally.

We've weathered our own losses and made dramatic changes to what we do in the world. And, like a snake shedding its skin, this new layer is still tender as we grow into it.

As songwriters, we connect best to ourselves and to the world through our music. What keeps us most rooted to the larger community is that we're activist songwriters. Our job is to listen closely to people's stories, especially stories that are silenced or obscured by dominant culture, and

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*"Each friend
represents a world
in us, a world
possibly not born
until they arrive,
and it is only by this
meeting that a new
world is born."*

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FRIENDSHIP

How do you cultivate and sustain friendship? What role does friendship play in your life?

RUSSELL

CLF Member, incarcerated in MD

This may sound ridiculous to some people but, I didn't know what actual friendship was until I got sentenced to Life Without Parole. When I found all of my known family and the people I considered friends fleeing my side, I felt devastated. I felt betrayed, neglected, rejected, lied to, and despised by everyone that I ever knew who said they loved me.

In this abject abandonment I held on to one sacred truth: "I still love me!" I was the only friend I actually ever had regardless of who rode with me

through my hard times or smiled alongside me on the ones that were good! And as long as that love resided in me, the people who were truly meant to be in my life would damn sure show up. Why? Because I never gave up on myself. Friendship means never giving up on a friend.

It took me hitting absolute rock bottom to learn that that's where I'd find all the true friends I would ever need in this world! When I felt that I "lost" all these people I previously knew, the truth is that I realized that I never "had" them. Learning how to be my own best friend prepared me for being another

person's best friend, not to be quick to judge them in their circumstances, how do I know what I would do if the shoe were on the other foot? Be honest but understanding, not laying out ones faults but helping them through them. And above this, love them for loving you! Not to seek to use them for personal gain, or violate their privacy when you feel inadequate. In doing this, a Twin-Like bond will appear and the communication will always continue to improve. Friendship is a word made up of Friend and a Ship. If two Friends work together there will always be Smoooooooooth Sailing! ■



PHOTO BY MARKOS MANT ON UNSPLASH

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amplify those stories through songs that invite you to close your eyes and sink into a steady rhythm, shed a tear for a story of someone you've never even met, shout down an injustice or celebrate in joyful harmony.

Music creates a web of connection. It suspends a moment in time for us to get a closer look at what's really going on, what we feel in our hearts and in our bodies: the loss, the pain, the power of what's possible when we join together to create change. The song can reveal for us how we're all connected in a moment in time. What things in our lives have we done that led to that moment. And what things have we not done that led us here. What needs have we paid attention to and what needs have we not.

In March of 2020, we started leading a weekly songwriting class that is still ongoing. We began the class so that we would have some source of income when all our gigs disappeared but we have found that it went much further than that, keeping us connected to our own writing as we pass on what we've learned over our decades of writing songs and giving our students an opportunity to hone and strengthen their skills, an expanding exploration into themselves—what they care about, what they love, what makes them laugh, what brings them comfort. We also started a weekly Sunday online gathering that included teaching our songs, inviting guest artists to teach theirs and joining

together for monthly concerts. (The videos are archived on our YouTube channel and our Facebook page.)

These gatherings lasted until the end of 2022 and were a touchstone for people—including some who were isolated because of health concerns, disability or geography—a place they could come every week, make friends and be in community. It was a touchstone for us, too, because it provided us with a routine for doing music and being part of and caring for a community. While we miss those gatherings, the demands of planning for and performing in person again require more of our time.

Writing, singing, performing with and to an audience has all shifted in

these times but the power of music and song to connect us remains strong. Music super charges connection. The message goes deeper when it's carried in a tender or powerful melody. It spreads farther as we carry these songs, sometimes through many years of our lives. As the CLF community knows well, people can still sing together, with the music physically vibrating in them and from them, helping to create a moment of sanctuary, even if our surroundings are not a sanctuary or a moment of collective power and unity, even when we are singing from our own separate spaces. May we each find that place of connection, of belonging. That space where there is no other. ■



Sandy O and Pat Humphries (l-r) of Emma's Revolution, Live at The UnNaugural Concert, Jan 20 2017, Silver Spring MD.

PHOTO CREDIT: TERRY GEORGIA

Embracing the Living Tradition



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

*"We are writing this in pencil, not etching it in stone."
— from the Article II Study
Commission Report 1/17/23*

One of the defining characteristics of our Unitarian Universalist faith is that ours is a "living tradition." We do not etch our faith in stone precisely because we hold sacred that it must change. It must adapt to new challenges, it must meet new understandings, and it must evolve based on new experiences and connections.

This change includes our most central language as well, which is why our Association's Bylaws mandate regular reviews of Article II of the UUA Bylaws, better known as the Principles, Sources, and Purposes of Unitarian Universalism.

The current version of how we articulate the center of Unitarian Universalism is the seven Principles. Those principles were introduced to us in 1985, and were a significant change from the concepts that preceded them. Their passage was not without disagreement, some of which was rooted in a love for the 1961 language.

In mid-January 2023, the commission that has been faithfully working for the past two years released their pro-



Members of the Article II Study Commission & some UUA Board/Administration Liaisons (l-r): Dr. Paula Cole Jones, Dr. Rob Spirko, Maya Waller, Becky Brooks, Kathy Burek, Rev. Meg Riley, Rev. Cheryl M. Walker, Satya Mamdani

posal for an Article II that leads our faith into the future. Most dramatically, it replaces our Principles with seven core Values, each of which comes with a charge to each of us, expressed as a covenant.

The values are centered on Love, named as a spiritual discipline that holds us together, and are named as Interdependence, Pluralism, Justice, Transformation, Generosity, and Equity. There's even a beautiful graphic representation of them in the report. There are more words, of course. And most of what we love about our current Principles lives on in some version in our Covenant.

Of course, this is the central document for the Unitarian Universalist Association, centered in the United States. It is not the guiding force for

UU congregations outside of our Association—including non-UUA member congregations elsewhere in our world. It remains to be seen how this understanding of Unitarian Universalism might ripple out and be transformed as it meets the realities of other cultural understandings of our faith. I hope it changes as it does so. It's a living tradition, after all.

I hope that CLF members will read the report and reflect on this new way of understanding our Unitarian Universalist faith. Delegates to the 2023 UUA General Assembly will vote on a final version of this proposal in June. We will likely hold engagement sessions over the next few months as materials come available to do so. Keep your email open for such announcements. ■

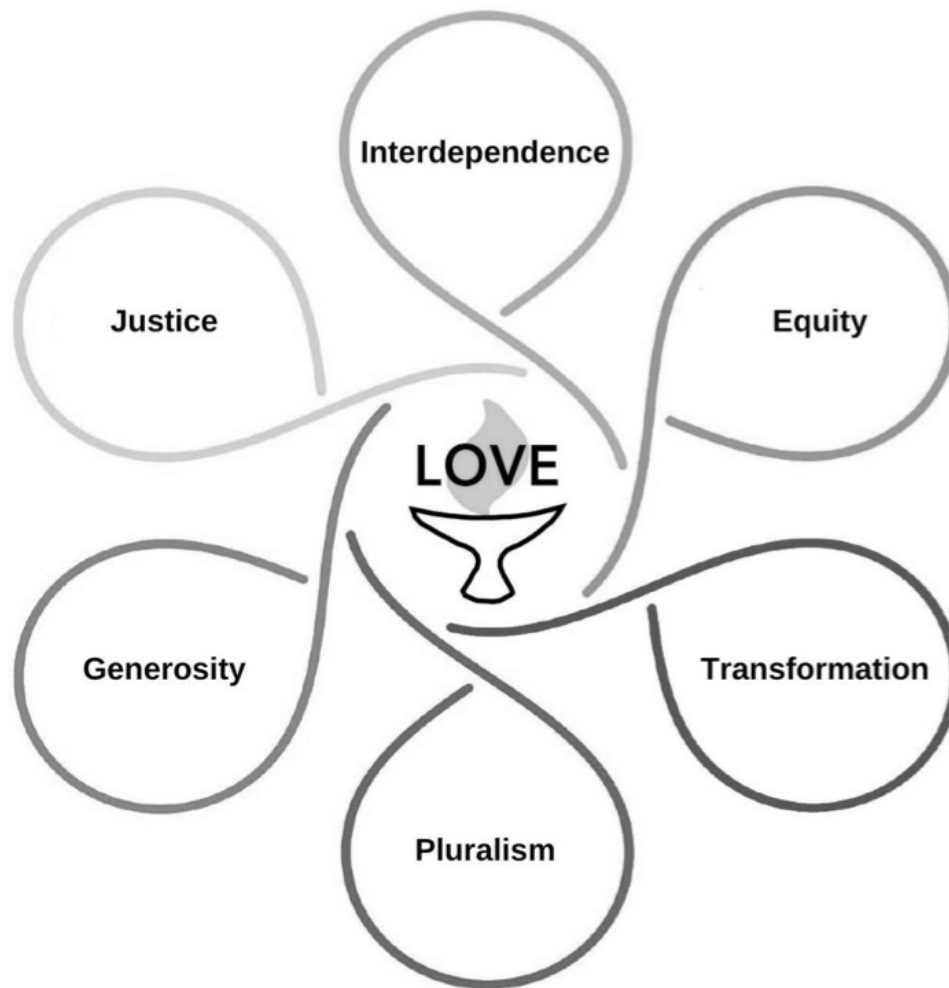


Image Description: This image is of a chalice with and overlay of the word love over the flame, with six outstretched arms that create a circle around each of the core values and form a six petal flower shape. Each arm is a different color and clockwise they are: Interdependence (Orange), Equity (Red), Transformation (Purple), Pluralism (Dark Blue), Generosity (Teal), and Justice (Yellow).

From the Article II Study Commission Report: a visualization of the new proposed language for Article II, defining six Unitarian Universalist Values, all centered in Love. Graphic design by Tanya Webster.



untitled flowing thoughts

MYSTIC RAIN

CLF member, incarcerated in TX

A little girl said to her make-believe best of friends:

"Today, I shall light a white candle.

No wait, maybe a green one, or

Perhaps an orange and a red.

There are so many to choose from –

Why not one of each color?

Yea! That will do," and so she told her make-believe best
of friends,

"We shall see

A white light

A green light

A red light

A brown light

A black light, and even a

Blue light, and let's not forget,

An orange light."

And so she lit one of each –

Only to find that the rainbow of colors

She had hoped for, got lost somewhere in the dark.

Should she cry and wait for Mom to come

To help her look for the rainbow of color lights?

Her make-believe best of friends said,

"Wait, call no one. Look, do you see?

All the tiny flames, their heat and their light

Are the same, and just as bright."

Even the space which separates one candle and the other

Can not change the sameness.

Oneness was born in the mind of the child.

Colors like skin and like many dresses were only robes

Which neither added nor subtracted anything from the
flames of the chalice.

Colors are stronger than light:

They blind the darkened mind

From seeing the same flame in one, as in the other,

Including the reflection of "mine."



UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLY PITTSBURGH • JUNE 21 - 25, 2023

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 Pittsburgh, PA from June 21-25, 2023. 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 vote on association business during General Sessions. General Sessions will be held from 2:30-5:30pm ET on

6/22-6/24 and 2:00-4:00pm PT on 6/25. 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. There is no registration fee for delegates who are attending only for business virtually at General Sessions.

If you'd like to participate in GA 2023 in this role, please fill out the online application at clfu.org/delegate-application. Visit the UUA's GA website at 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.

What is your initial reaction to learning about the proposed new Article II described by Rev. Michael on page 4? Would you like to learn more about the process and what the new language means?

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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