

Embracing Repair



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In a world marked by imperfections and the passage of time, the concept of repair takes on a profound significance. Repair is not merely about fixing broken objects or restoring functionality; it extends to healing relationships, bridging divides, and nurturing our connection with the world around us.

Repair, at its heart, embodies the essence of compassion, forgiveness, and growth. It's not about sweeping problems under the rug; it's about facing them head-on, armed with the belief that even the most shattered connections can be healed.

For us, this sentiment resonates strongly with our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person. This principle reminds us that every individual, no matter their background or circumstances, deserves respect and the opportunity to rebuild what might be broken.

Rooted in the Unitarian Universalist values, the idea of repair is not just a practical necessity but a spiritual calling that encourages us to cultivate compassion, empathy, and a commitment to justice.

Not too long ago, I was harmed inadvertently. My first instinct was to run, to put as much distance between

myself and the people causing the harm. I'd never been in a position where repair was on the table, much less the next step in a relationship. Over time, I received apologies that were sincere and full of ownership and a change in policy and rules to make sure no one else would have to endure the same harm in the same way. I didn't have to do or ask for any of these things, they did it on their own. As time went on, I realized they not only meant it, but they were eager to repair the relationship.

It's up to me to accept when I'm ready. I share this live story because this is not the normal outcome. It is more often the case that harm is met with gaslighting, anger, or even outright denial. This incident showed me that there could be another way. Mistakes and harm, intentional or not, could lead to stronger relationships. I can't predict the future to know if this will lead to lasting relationships that survive this 'ouch' but I can accept their apologies and allow repair with grace.

Communities can heal and thrive through repair. In a world filled with divisiveness, UUs stand as advocates for unity and harmony. Repairing the bonds that hold communities together exemplifies the transformative power of commitment to growth, both individually and collectively.

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Quest

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*“Forgiveness
is not an
occasional act,
it is a constant
attitude.”*

REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

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REPAIR

What does repair look and feel like to you?

Have you experienced significant moments of repair in your relationship with yourself or others?

JACOB (MOMMA BEAR)

CLF member incarcerated in AR

To me, repair means to mend, heal or fix. It is a way to fix, correct and heal what has been neglected, broken or allowed to decay. The hardest part of repairing relationships for me has been figuring out why. Why did they fall apart, flounder or just disappear? To help me with this I went through a year of therapy as well as Vipassana (or Insight) Meditation. Through this struggle I have seen things within myself that have caused the relationships to flounder, disappear, or become negative.

By seeing this I have tried to truly address and change these things. It has led to the creation of new relationships, but I have not been successful at repairing any of the old ones. Disappearing into the prison system seems to have made it so that the ones who were my friends and family could disappear, leaving me clutching thin air. ■



PHOTO BY KELLY SIKKEMA ON UNSPLASH

MATTHEW

CLF member, formerly incarcerated in ND

Repair for me as I sit here comes from the heart of a sorry man. Change must always start with yourself and must do it for yourself – if you do it for someone else, you as the individual will never take the change fully to heart.

As you read this, I will finally be free and home after spending 7 years of a 10 year prison sentence in North

Dakota. Take time to get outside and breathe some fresh air, read books that are educational to learn a skill to bring out here. Seek help for mental illness – it is ok to be weak, you don't have to be a tough person!

Remember: you're placed on this earth for a purpose, and someone is looking up to you. If anything, help yourself so you get well to mentor the younger generations. ■

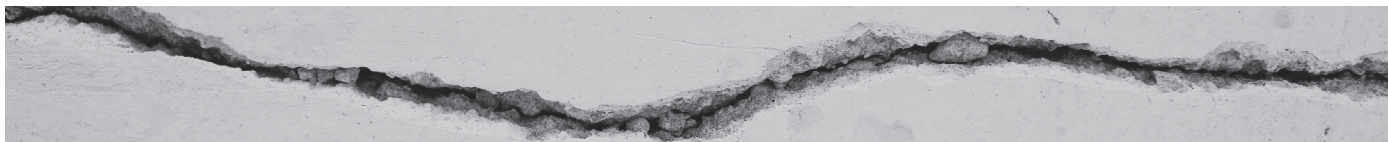


PHOTO BY BRINA BLUM ON UNSPLASH

KYALE

CLF member, incarcerated in MI

After wronging another human being and becoming a convicted felon, I looked at the fences around me and made them a reflection of my personality and soul. At the time, I could not grasp the concept of being repaired because I believed that I did not deserve to have my self image repaired, nor did I deserve to have my life restored. As a result, I made suffering my penance, believing I had lost my right to pursue happiness, make meaningful friendships, and contribute to society in the ways I wanted to. When it was all said and done, I experienced so much misery and heart ache from these beliefs that I lost myself and all of my motivation to do the things I loved.

I never would have escaped that dark spiral if not for the love and charity of friends and volunteers. They came from all walks of life, some were free and some were incarcerated. They were Christians, Jews, Muslims, Wiccans, Humanists and Atheists. And though their beliefs about the origins of our Universe were different, they all embraced the same kind of love when they came to my rescue.

They showed me that prison could be more than just a house of suffering. Behind these bars I could grow and change for the better. They encouraged me to participate in classes and rehabilitation programs that introduced me to new ideas and



PHOTO BY JOVIS ALOOR ON UNSPLASH

new friends. My mind expanded, my heart grew, and I finally saw that my self-imposed suffering and solitude was doing a disservice to my neighbors. Why? Because we all belonged to each other, which meant they needed me to uplift them just as much as I needed them!

There is no “repairing” without a return to a prior state. In other words, I had this joy and purpose within me all along but had simply forgotten about them. It took a community and the grace of God to show me that I had so much more to offer than just my suffering. And when I finally committed to my right to experience joy, to pursue my dreams, to be loved and to serve others, I was repaired and restored because I was free to be me again.

Looking back on it all, that’s what repairing means to me. It’s about more than just fixing a broken person. We all have it in us to be happy, peaceful

and productive, but it requires us to see ourselves clearly. To be repaired is to be returned to ourselves. We already have the power to forgive ourselves and to make the most of our lives no matter where we are. We just need to be reminded of this.

Thank God for the people who held up that mirror and said, “Remember who you are.” It was this insight and help that repaired my relationship with myself, to stop punishing myself and start spending more time being that mirror for members of my prison community who need it.

And to you, the reader: who in your life is always reminding you about your best and authentic self? Who looks at your hopes and dreams and tells you they are beautiful and worth pursuing? Who tells you when it is time to forgive yourself? Who out there has repaired you by returning you to yourself? ■

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Repair is inherently tied to justice and equity. It involves acknowledging historical injustices, working to rectify them, and ensuring that compassion and empathy guide our interactions with others.

In the warm embrace of Unitarian Universalist values, the concept of repair takes on a transformative meaning. It becomes a guiding light, illuminating the path toward justice, compassion, and interconnectedness. Repairing brokenness, be it in relationships, communities, or the environment, aligns harmoniously

with the principles that Unitarian Universalists hold dear. As we navigate the complexities of our world, may we draw inspiration from these values and strive to be agents of repair, fostering healing, understanding, and unity in all that we do. ■

Scars

JEKAREN OLAOYA

from All the Pieces Fit

Scars
Are proof that
Life has moved forward
Has either hurt
Or healed
Changed

There is strength there
In the space between
Where the skin
Knits itself together

The power of what
We can't see easily
Gives us strength
We didn't know we had

There is beauty there
Where the healing happens
It seems angry like fire
But it is life
Eager to be repaired

There is no brokenness
Though fragile
Our skin is strong enough
To break only under
Extreme pressure
And we are mostly ok
After

Scars don't take away from
Or make us less
It's ok to be afraid
To show them

But know
You will always be
Worthy
And free to be
Whole
No matter how many scars
Grace your body
In service to who you are

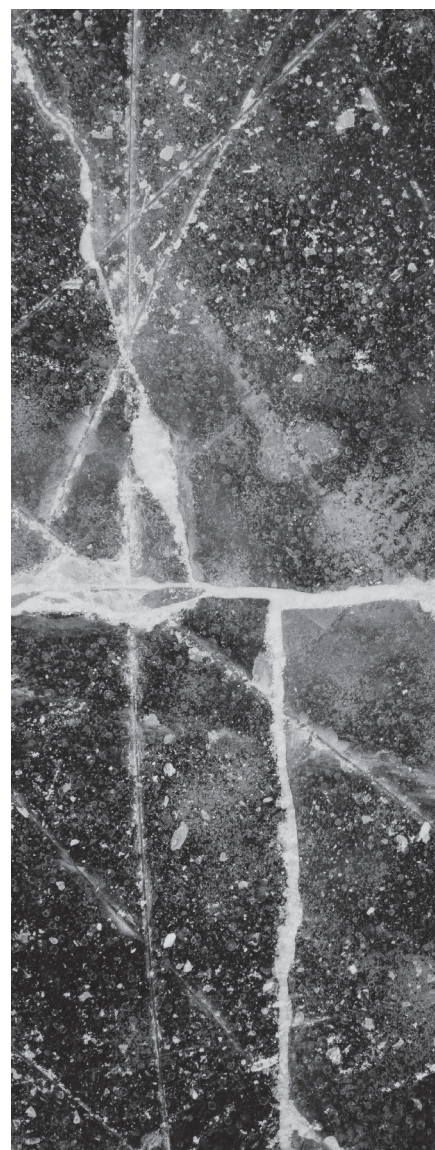
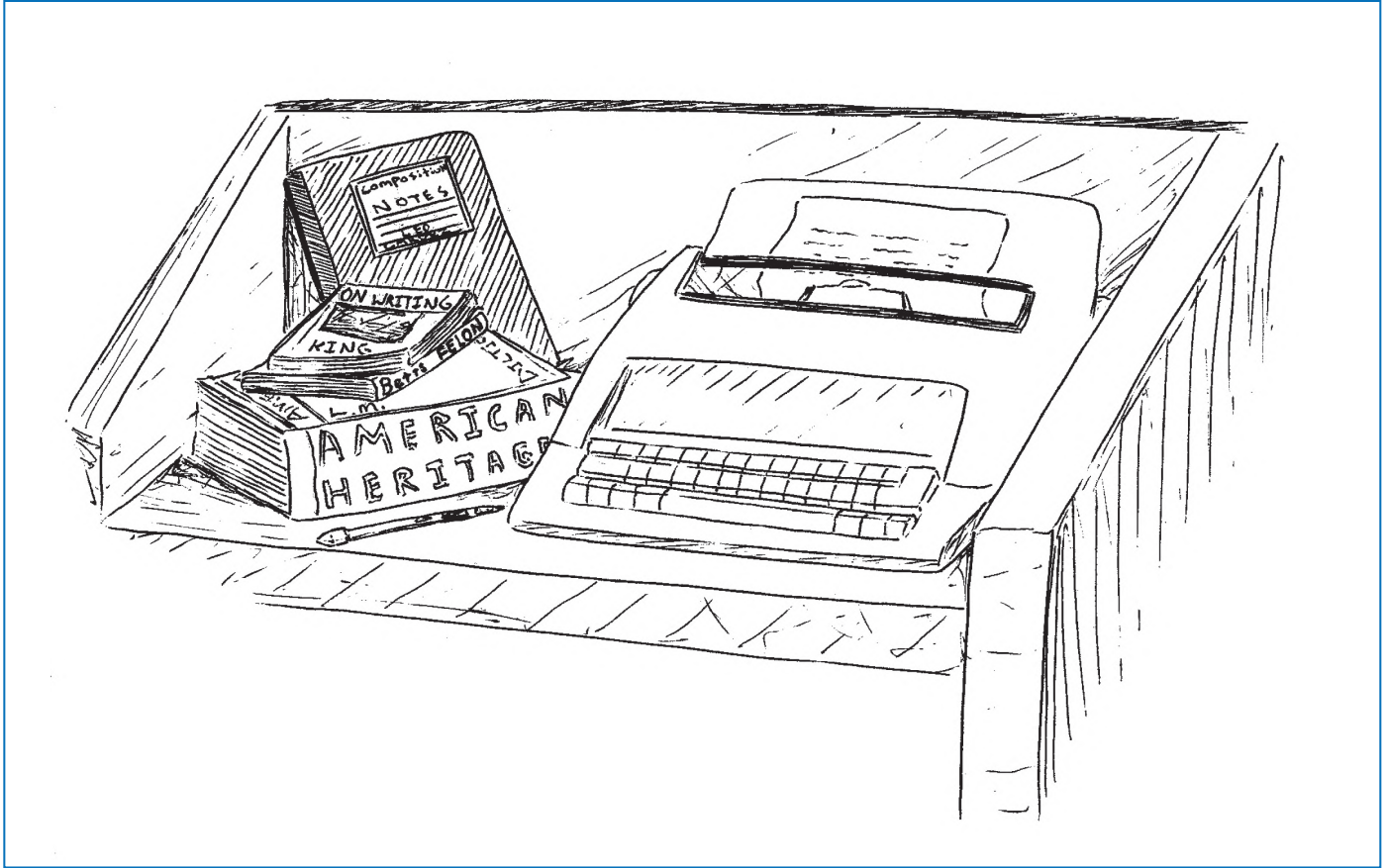


PHOTO BY TOM BARRETT ON UNSPLASH

Writing My Wrongs



"Writing My Wrongs" by Leo Cardez

LEO CARDEZ

CLF member, incarcerated in IL

There is nothing exactly like living in Hell, but there is something close to it: jail and prison. In my hell, where I lived for most of 2015, there is, as Dante understood, no hope. People think the worst part of being locked up is the loss of freedom. They are wrong. The worst part is the loss of hope and purpose. You wake up every morning realizing your nightmare will continue into your waking hours.

The loss you have suffered is permanent. Life will never be the same. In many real ways you are already dead, just unburied. There is no healing, no improvement, but even worse, there is no possibility of any to come. The most unbearable thing about your unbearable life is that you will always be forced to bear it.

In the midst of my horrific incarceration experience, alone and desperate to stop hemorrhaging relationships, I wondered if those who hated me

were watching somehow they might find my misery satisfying? I might have, if I believed everything that was said about me. On a particularly dark evening, I considered doing just that. I doubted anyone could despise me more than I did myself — I couldn't even stand my own reflection. But one can only fall so deep into the well before being consumed by the darkness. I admit, I considered

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Writing My Wrongs, cont. from page 5

the coward's solution, but in writing my final note, I could not find the right words to convey the magnitude of what I was feeling. I refused to settle and postponed my act of desperation another night. Night after night I tried, but there were no words big enough... Instead, I found myself simply journaling about my day.

I wrote about everything and nothing, whatever popped into my head. My only rule was raw honesty. I figured if this was to mean anything to anyone it must above all be true. I didn't realize honest writing will tear your guts out. Like when I wrote about the shame and pain I saw in my mother's eyes when she came to visit me in prison — knowing it was my fault, and worse,

I could do nothing to help her. That feeling of helplessness was like being stuck in a barrel at the bottom of the ocean with no options. There is nothing worse.

Still I wrote. Everyday. I wrote by the light of the morning sun through my dirty cracked window or glare of the hallway lights through my cell bars. I promised myself I would write every day, no excuses... and I have. Now, 7 years later, I have learned that writing to me wasn't a diversion, it was my church. It offered salvation in the promise of change. Escaping Hell is difficult because sometimes there are too many people who enjoy seeing you there, but with enough effort,

grace; and in my case, pens and paper, it can be done.

As I re-read some of my earliest journal entries, I marvel at the flawed, petty, unhappy person I was. I also noticed that as my writing evolved into a more positive realm, so did my actual life. My writing became prophetic. As I tried to make the best of things, every now and then, I succeeded. As I look around today I can see that writing has helped me appreciate life in a whole new light.

When my parents wrote to tell me they were proud of me, even as I sat in prison, I am not ashamed to admit: I wept. I cried again after my sister's last visit, seeing her changed and beautiful from the inside out; having found what she had been searching for, though not in the places she had been looking. I owe all of it to the power of the written word. It has taught me how to look inward in order to look forward. It has provided me with the key to an escape hatch to the next chapter of my life. ■



PHOTO BY JAKE GIVENS ON UNSPLASH

Updates from the CLF's 2023 Annual Meeting



JODY MALLOY

*Executive Director,
Church of the Larger
Fellowship*

The CLF held its Annual Congregational Meeting on Sunday June 11, 2023. Anyone who could not attend the meeting was invited to vote by mail ahead of the meeting. We received 248 votes by mail and 43 members attended the meeting.

CLF members voted for the slate of nominations presented by the nominating committee (272 yes, 3 no, 7 abstain) as follows:

- Rev. Dr. JJ Flag for Board of Directors for a three year term

- Heather Gatland for Board of Directors for a three year term
- Rev. Christe Lunsford for Board of Directors for a three year term
- Doreen Christiani for Board of Directors for one year (to complete an unfinished term)
- Darbi Lockridge for Treasurer for a one year term
- Mandy Neff for Clerk for a one year term
- Katie Resendiz de Perez for Nominating Committee for a three year term

CLF members also voted to ordain Steven Leigh Williams, a CLF Learning Fellow, as a Unitarian Universalist minister (269 yes, 2 no, 9 abstain). Steven

was recommended for ministry by the UUA Ministerial Fellowship-ping Committee. The now-Reverend Steven's ordination was on July 2, 2023. ■



Rev. Steven during his ordination

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Due to recent budget constraints, including reduction in contributions and rising print/mailing costs, we've had to reassess the printing and mailing of Quest issues. We've made the difficult decision not to print/mail the October and December 2023 and March 2024 Quest issues. Instead, these issues will only be available online at clfuu.org/quest.

We know many of our members are not able to access Quest online. For our incarcerated members, we have chosen the October, December, and March issues because these are months you will receive other CLF mailings such as the Worthy Now newsletter and holiday messages.

We hope to return to print/mailing Quest every month in the future, as contributions increase and our budget allows. If you have any questions, concerns, or comments about this change, please use the back of this page to write to us at CLF UU, 24 Farnsworth St., Boston MA 02210 or clf@clfuu.org.

Aisha Hauser, MSW, CRE-ML

Christina Rivera

Rev. Dr. Michael Tino

CLFUU Board of Directors



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