

# Soul Matters 2020-2021

## June's Theme: Living with Hope and Gratitude

*The Soul Matters Sharing Circles provide an opportunity to explore our congregation's overall theme for the 2020-2021 program year, and within that, each monthly theme. We reflect on the previous month's theme in more depth. Here is my theme reflection from The Beacon newsletter:*

There is a song written by Unitarian Universalist Rev. John Corrado whose words are:

Voice still and small, deep inside all,  
I hear you call, singing.  
In storm and rain, sorrow and pain,  
Still we'll remain singing.  
Calming my fears, quenching my tears,  
Through all the years, singing.

*Singing the Living Tradition, #391, copyright 1987*

Often, I'm brought to tears when I sing it. Sometimes those tears are for pain I may be feeling in my life at that time (or because I know someone close to me who in pain). Sometimes they are tears of gratitude for being part of community where I can be who I am (most of the time). That's part of the power of singing. Singing in a community (even in the unusual way we are doing that on Zoom these days) it is still good for our well-being – individually and collectively. Singing builds community.

Community is also created through being compassionate and caring:

- where we learn as we go (and acknowledge when we stumble in our learning)
- where we practice offering each other our thanks
- where we encourage each other to feel hope
- where we practice becoming more intentionally inclusive (so people can be more of who they are, more of the time)

June's theme is "Living with Hope and Gratitude." Amidst all that is storming around us, the sorrow, the pain, the fears, how do we cultivate hope? How do we practice gratitude? Amidst a busy life, sometimes I need to go to a quiet place to hear that "voice still and small" inside me, to realize how I'm feeling, what I'm thinking. It might be in a park close by or on my balcony. It happens sometimes when I'm washing dishes or even just sitting in my car, waiting for a light to change. I hope you'll make some time to do that for yourself as well – even if it just means stepping outside on a clear night and looking up at the stars.

I look forward to exploring this month how we live with hope and gratitude. I'll kick off the theme at the June 6 Sunday service. If there are ways you develop hope, let me know (if you're willing). Even start a conversation with someone you're close to about it. If you are finding yourself feeling grateful for someone – what they did or said – let them know. Life is too precious - and the amount of time we have on this earth is unknown for most of us - not

to share our gratitude with those around us. We are fortunate to be living on this beautiful blue-green planet Earth.

If you want to share your thoughts/feelings/practices about hope and gratitude with me, please contact me: minister@beaconunitarian.org, cell 778-870-9015.

I'm also going to try something new for a monthly theme. The Pastoral Care Team successfully used a Pinup corkboard online for sharing Joys and Sorrows the May weekend we had the national Canadian Unitarian Council service (when we didn't hold a separate Beacon service). So, I'm offering a new Pinup board for people to share their thoughts/feelings/practices about hope and gratitude:

<https://pinup.com/nXIDdWCjR>

Feel free to add a post-it note and write on it something you hope for or something you feel grateful for this month. (I'll put directions on the online Pinup board for how to do that.) I look forward to hearing from you and also for you to hear from each other this month.

In the spirit of life,

Rev. Meg Roberts

## A Spiritual Exercise for This Coming Month

Unitarian Universalists want to do more than just read and talk about spiritual topics—they enjoy experiential learning. Many of us learn and process concepts best through direct experience. Given this, group members are invited to choose a “spiritual exercise” on each month’s topic to engage prior to the meeting. I ask you to try the exercises, believing that—whether you “enjoyed” it or not—the experience of doing it will help you learn something about life and yourself—something that sitting in a room just thinking about the topic never could. ***I invite you to choose one of the spiritual exercises below and try it out over the coming month.***

### **Option A**

Do a spiritual exercise of praying or meditating about living with hope and/or gratitude (or adapt this to some other spiritual practice you do). Find the space and time to listen to that “voice still and small” (whatever you understand that to be – your conscience, your mindful self, and/or a sense of knowing when connected to a higher power).

- How does your relationship to a higher power/divine source, within the universe relate to hope or gratitude?
- If belief in a higher power doesn't have relevance in your philosophy/theology, meditate on living a life of hope and gratitude and how it relates to human-to-human behaviour.

What comes up for you? Considering what comes up, choose one thing you will focus on this month. Come back to the group with your reflections on your experience.

#### **Option B**

This month, write in a journal three things you feel grateful for each day. Alternatively, each night before you go to sleep, think of three things you feel grateful for that day. Notice how this affects your month. Come back to the group with an insight you've had from doing this spiritual exercise.

#### **Option C**

Watch this [TED Talk: 'Want to be happy? Be grateful.'](#) – by David Steindl-Rast

The one thing all humans have in common is that each of us wants to be happy, says Brother David Steindl-Rast, a monk and interfaith scholar. And happiness, he suggests, is born from gratitude. An inspiring lesson in slowing down, looking where you're going, and above all, being grateful.

He gives some very practical ways of incorporating being creative in how we can stop / look / go and become more grateful--and that's what leads us to feel happy. Try this as a spiritual practice over the next few weeks, at least a couple of times a week. Notice how you are feeling, and how it affects your feelings of gratitude and as a result, feelings of happiness. Come to the group with at least two examples of when you tried the stop / look / go, and how that affected your day.

#### **Option D**

Spend time this month reading stories of resilience and responses to crisis that create hope. What are your stories of resilience? How have you responded in creative ways to foster hope in your life? If you have a creative response to what is happening in your life that can help foster hope, try it out and then come back to the group with some thoughts to share from doing this spiritual exercise.

#### **Option E**

The June theme Pinup board is for people to share their thoughts/feelings/practices about hope and gratitude: <https://pinup.com/nXlDdWCjR>

At least once this month, go to read the posts and perhaps add your own post-it note. Write about something you hope for or something you feel grateful for this month. Come back to the group with some thoughts to share from doing this spiritual exercise.

#### **Option F**

What is a spiritual exercise that comes to your mind when you think of the theme of “living with hope and gratitude”? Consider other resources in this theme packet. Create that exercise and share it with the group by email (if you are willing). Include the principle in your creative expression (dance, drawing, journaling, music, etc.). Come to the group at our online meeting to share what it was like to create this exercise, how it was to do it, and what you learned from it.

## Questions to Live With:

Don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and **find the one that 'hooks' you most**. Then let it take you on a ride. Live with it over the next couple of weeks. **Let it wander around in your unconscious the rest of the time**. Allow it to break into--and break open--your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share with the group something of what came up for you.

1. How do I cultivate a thankful heart?
2. What gets in the way of experiencing gratitude?
3. What helps me be grateful even when I'm dealing with difficult people or circumstances?
4. Who have I sincerely thanked recently for something I've overlooked in the past?
5. What give me hope?
6. Who encourages me to feel hopeful?
7. What are my stories of resilience? How have I responded in creative ways to foster hope in my life? (or the lives of others?)
8. What spiritual practices help me develop hope?
9. When have I felt hopeless? How did I get through it?
10. What helps me feel hopeful within my close relationships (especially when things are not easy)?
11. What is the difference between wishing and hoping?
12. What question do I wish had been included here? I'll ask myself that question instead.

## Other Resources

### Quotes for the weekly e-news update: Beacon This Week

**June 3 –**

"The very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof."

— Barbara Kingsolver *Animal Dreams*

**June 10 –**

"Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul  
And sings the tune without the words  
And never stops at all."

— Emily Dickinson

**June 17 –**

"Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer. And let faith be the bridge you build to overcome evil and welcome good."

- Maya Angelou

**June 24 –**

“You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one.”

— John Lennon

### **Family Resources – *How do live with gratitude and hope?***

#### Option 1:

Talk about what hope is and how we can create hope. It is not just wishful thinking, hope is actually thinking about what is achievable, having positive feelings about it and then figuring out ways to achieve those things (or at least working towards them). Share one hope you have for the week to come and if it makes sense to do this, figure out how to help each other to achieve those hopes or at least work towards them.

#### Option 2:

Write a card of thanks to each member of your family – or draw a picture to thank them for something they did for you or something you like about them. If you enjoy doing that, maybe do the same for a family friend or relative who might appreciate getting a card or picture like that.

*Also, check out Ashley's monthly theme-based kits. Email her if you aren't yet receiving it then share it with friends, family and neighbours: [dre@beaconunitarian.org](mailto:dre@beaconunitarian.org).*

### **Quotes**

“Sorrow prepares you for joy. It violently sweeps everything out of your house, so that new joy can find space to enter. It shakes the yellow leaves from the bough of your heart, so that fresh, green leaves can grow in their place. It pulls up the rotten roots, so that new roots hidden beneath have room to grow. Whatever sorrow shakes from your heart, far better things will take their place.”

- Rumi

“There is a saying in Tibetan, 'Tragedy should be utilized as a source of strength.'

No matter what sort of difficulties, how painful experience is, if we lose our hope, that's our real disaster.”

— Dalai Lama XIV

“Hope is the deep religious conviction that God has not quit.”

— Walter Breuggemann

“You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope.”

— Thomas Merton

## **Worship Resources from the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Worship Web**

**Chalice Lighting** – by Laurel S. Sheridan

Take from life its coals, not its ashes.  
Fan the flames of love and justice;  
join hands and hearts in common endeavor;  
and there will be no limit to what we can achieve together.

**Chalice Lighting** by Vance Bass

Every day brings struggle, every day brings joy. Every day brings us the opportunity to ease the struggle of another, to be the joy in another's life. May this flame remind us to carry our light to each other and to the world

**Chalice Lighting** – by Leslie Takahashi

All that we have ever loved  
And all that we have ever been  
Stands with us on the brink  
Of all that we aspire to create:  
A deeper peace,  
A larger love,  
A more embracing hope,  
A deeper joy in this life we share.

**Invocation – by Nadine McSpadden**

During our darkest moments, still, there is hope.  
When facing our biggest challenges, still, there is hope.  
When all we can do is put one foot in front of the other, still, there is hope.  
When we can’t find the way out, still, there is hope.  
When all we can do to help is hold someone’s hand as they cry, still, there is hope.  
We are the hope—for ourselves and for one another.  
Always, there is hope.

**Poem** - "Hope" by Jennifer Pratt-Walter

See how the winds  
have shaped her hands to  
hold hope?  
So tenuous, it trembles  
like a hummingbird's heart.

She gently carries hope  
to a nest in the midst  
of the maelstrom and tilts it  
into the bowl of tiny feathers and mosses.

Hope is so hard to cup.  
She might need your help  
when it seeps through the cracks  
of her fingers. Place your hands  
like this around hers. Together  
it can be done.

When it hatches, when the nest  
is no more, watch the wind pick up hope  
and lay it softly into the welcome  
of upraised palms.

**Affirmation** by Jay E. Abernathy, Jr.

We affirm that love is our greatest purpose.  
Accepting one another is the truest form of faithful living.  
The search for truth is our constant star.  
We pledge our hearts, minds, and hands:  
To challenge injustice with courage;  
To find hope in times of fear;  
And to live out our Unitarian Universalist values every day as a beloved community.  
Thus do we covenant with each other and with all that is sacred in life.

**Reflection** by Ashley Horan

How is it with your soul?

This is the question that John Wesley, Anglican priest and the founder of Methodism, was known to ask of participants in small reflection groups. I ask you because, for me, this has been a hard week. So, beloveds, how is it with your souls?

If your response to that question is anything like mine, I want to invite you to pause as you read this. Take a deep breath, say a prayer, sing a song, light your chalice, feel the force of gravity pulling us all toward the same center—whatever helps you feel more rooted and less alone.

Now do it again. And again, and again.

And, once you feel that rootedness and connection, hear this:

**You are loved beyond belief.** You are enough, you are precious, your work and your life matter, and you are not alone. **You are part of a "we,"** a great cloud of witnesses living and dead who have insisted that this beautiful, broken world of ours is a blessing worthy of both deep gratitude and fierce protection. Our ancestors and our descendants are beckoning us, compelling us onward toward greater connection, greater compassion, greater commitment to one another and to the earth. Together, **we are resilient and resourceful** enough to say "yes" to that call, to make it our life's work in a thousand different ways, knowing that we can do no other than bind ourselves more tightly together, and throw ourselves into **the holy work of showing up**, again and again, to be part of building that world of which we dream but which we have not yet seen.

**Reading** - adapted from UU Rev. Kenneth Patton, "Hymns for the Celebration of Life"

Who can make an accounting of gratitude?

For the universe we give thanks, an expanse of life to stretch us with wonder...

For the earth we give thanks, fragment of the stars that is our home...

For life we give thanks, the burning of stars ordered and tempered here allowing us life and breath...

For growth we give thanks, for the heritage of the spirit, for all the forces past our knowing, power past our control...

For the ages which follow us, for the eternity of days, in which life is ever renewed and fulfilled, we give thanks.