

A long-exposure photograph of a waterfall cascading over mossy rocks in a lush forest. The water is blurred, creating a soft, ethereal effect. The surrounding environment is filled with vibrant green foliage and moss-covered stones.

The Practice of

Active Engagement

How are we working for a
just and compassionate society?

Roots of Resilience Theme Packet
January 2025

“We strive to work joyfully for a just and compassionate society, experimenting with new forms of community.”

Dear Meaning Maker,

Of the five aspirations of Canadian Unitarian Universalism, this is the aspiration that is the biggest stretch for me. Being on the introvert side of things, raised to be quiet and polite, I prefer to be an observer rather than an active participant.

Achieving social change and improving public policy is often a lot of connecting and talking and meetings and events and mulling over details and talking and accepting compromises and then more planning and meetings and details and compromises and repeat over and over again. Not to mention the failed initiatives and the defeated motions and all the disappointment over and over again.

This is nothing but a painful slog to me! And yet I know that’s exactly how slavery was abolished, why there are weekends and minimum wages, how women got the vote, how same sex couples can marry.

Because people – not the people in power – but ordinary everyday people made it so, fought for these rights over and over and over again until even the powerful had to shift.

So I know it’s vital to be actively engaged, particularly for people of the chalice who seek a world of love and justice. This world won’t happen without us.

So fortunately for introverted me, our aspiration says we are to work Joyfully. I think the joyful part is essential. Being actively engaged isn’t a one and done situation, and all the meetings and talking and planning are only part of the task.

I was part of the climate change movement in the nineties, thirty years ago, and the warnings had already been around for twenty years even then. Striving for a just and compassionate society takes a lifetime, and that means the effort has to be a part of a full joyful life.

As a young woman, Russian anarchist and feminist Emma Goldman insisted that her revolution did not demand the denial of life and joy. She famously insisted on her right to dance and said the revolution must include “freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody’s right to beautiful, radiant things.”

(<https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/goldman/Features/danceswithfeminists.html>)

Everybody has a right to beautiful, radiant things. As we work for a better world, find the work that brings you joy, expresses yourself, whatever that might look like for you.

Blessings,

Fiona

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The Practice of Active Engagement

How are we working for a just and compassionate society?

- Think about a time when you worked for or spoke up for your values. What did you learn about yourself?
- What types of active engagement do you enjoy and what forms do you tend to avoid, and why?
- Do you feel comfortable talking about climate change? What helps (or would help) you actively engage on this topic?

We don't know that it's too late. It's in the doing and trying that we define that we're a species that's worthy. We've got to act because that is our hope.

– David Suzuki

Your no makes the way for your yes. Boundaries create the container within which your yes is authentic. Being able to say no makes yes a choice.

- adrienne maree brown

The planet already contains all the wisdom of the universe, as do you and I. It has the ability to recover built into its DNA and we have the ability to change what we are doing so this can happen. – Christi Belcourt

We have described for you a mountain. We have shown you the path to the top. We call upon you to do the climbing. - Murray Sinclair

Planetary house rules:

(1) take only your share;

(2) clean up after yourself;

(3) keep the house in good repair for those who will use it after you.

- Sallie McFague

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: CHILD MIND

This month's spiritual practices come from Buddhist scholar and activist Joanna Macy, who is famous for reminding us that we don't need to feel obliged to respond to each cry for help:

You don't need to do everything. Do what calls your heart; effective action comes from love. It is unstoppable, and it is enough.

Here, then, are two practices from Macy's writings. Is there one that resonates for you? If yes, then try it. If not, then choose to use your time in another way!

Child Mind

This practice was designed primarily for families and people with kids in their lives, but is also valuable for those of us who do not have kids in our lives.

This practice was created by Jo del Amor in 2022 and is included in her book *Raising Children in the Midst of Global Crisis: a Compassionate Guidebook for New Paradigm Parenting*. If you share this practice, please acknowledge this source and the work that reconnects: <https://workthatreconnects.org/resources/childs-mind/>

As adults, our ways of seeing the world can be embedded in old paradigms in ways that we may not realize. One of the gifts of spending time with children is the opportunity to begin again ourselves. This practice of the child mind invites us to loosen our hold on "the way it is" and look at the world alongside the child.

- Divide into pairs. One partner is the adult and the other is a six year old.
- Give the adult a moment to come up with something they have learned, from their direct personal experience, that would be different than how most adults would understand it. This could be any truth where you have an explanation that would be different than the "standard answer."
- Meanwhile, the person playing the six year old enters into their 'child mind.' FYI, six year olds are intelligent and inquisitive. They ask questions when they don't understand words or concepts.
- When the adult is ready, they attempt to explain their concept as plainly and honestly as they can, without talking down. The six year old will interrupt to ask questions -- be sure not to cut off the adult too often, but do let them know when you don't understand a word. Keep it lively, but don't badger them.
- After 5 minutes, pause and reflect on the experience, then change roles.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: CAPACITIES

When I Made a Difference

“Recounting incidents from our own lives, we recognize our capacity to create positive change. This is all the more valuable since we are not accustomed to sharing this kind of experience or understanding it as power.”

This practice comes from chapter 8 of *Coming Back to Life* by Joanna Macy and Molly Brown; second edition (2014). Please acknowledge the source when you use any of these practices:

<https://workthatreconnects.org/resources/when-i-made-a-difference/>

In a small group, in conversation with a friend, or in your journal, remember a time when something good or important happened because of something you said or did. Tell the story. If you are speaking with others or another, listen for the qualities that the others embodied in their story: courage, empathy, compassion, flexibility, letting go, trust or any other capacities. If you are writing in your journal, circle the key moments in the story. What qualities did you exhibit in that moment?

Consider the ways in which these qualities are a kind of power. Sometimes when we think of “power” we think of “power over” people, which can have a negative connotation. There are many other kinds of power, including “power with” and “power for.” How would you describe the kind of power that you experienced in that moment?

If you are in a group, list all the capacities and their forms of power.
How might these powers be used for good in the world?

"Nothing is softer or more flexible than water, yet nothing can resist it".

Lao Tzu

QUOTES

Much of the oxygen we breathe comes from plants that died long ago. We can give thanks to these ancestors of our present-day foliage, but we can't give back to them. We can, however, give forward. When we are unable to return the favor, we can pay it forward to someone or something else. Using this approach, we can see ourselves as part of a larger flow of giving and receiving throughout time. Receiving from the past, we can give to the future. When tackling issues such as climate change, the stance of gratitude is a refreshing alternative to guilt or fear as a source of motivation.

— Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

There's a song that wants to sing itself through us. We just got to be available. Maybe the song that is to be sung through us is the most beautiful requiem for an irreplaceable planet or maybe it's a song of joyous rebirth as we create a new culture that doesn't destroy its world. But in any case, there's absolutely no excuse for our making our passionate love for our world dependent on what we think of its degree of health, whether we think it's going to go on forever. Those are just thoughts anyway. But this moment you're alive, so you can just dial up the magic of that at any time.

— Joanna Macy

Taking action is the best way to live in conditions of crisis and violation, for your spirit and your conscience as well as for society.

Rebecca Solnit

Every morning I awake torn between a desire to save the world and an inclination to savor it. This makes it hard to plan the day. But if we forget to savor the world, what possible reason do we have for saving it? In a way, the savoring must come first.

E.B. White

Action on behalf of life transforms. Because the relationship between self and the world is reciprocal, it is not a question of first getting enlightened or saved and then acting. As we work to heal the earth, the earth heals us.

- Robin Wall Kimmerer

The only way to approach such a period — where uncertainty is very large and one cannot predict what the future holds — is not to predict, but to act inventively and exuberantly in diverse, adventures in living and experiment.

Buzz Holling

The Bookshelf

adrienne maree brown. *Pleasure activism: The politics of feeling good* (2019).

<https://www.akpress.org/pleasure-activism.html>

Jessica J. Lee. *Two Trees Make a Forest* (2020).

<https://www.jessicajleewrites.com/two-trees>

Joanna Macy and Molly Brown. *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects* ().

<https://workthatreconnects.org/resources/coming-back-to-life-the-updated-guide-to-the-work-that-reconnects/>

Randy Lundy, *Field Notes for the Self* (2020).

<https://uofrpress.ca/Books/F/Field-Notes-for-the-Self>

Resmaa Menakem. *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathways to Mending our Hearts and Bodies* (2017).

<https://resmaa.com/merch/>

From CBC Kids News - how to be an activist:

<https://youtu.be/I1Fx3m2oPC4?si=O6TOvLQse93cYrOD>

A new book, *You Can Be an Activist: How to Use Your Strengths and Passions to Make a Difference* (2024), for Canadian kids, by youth activist Charlene Rocha and author Mary Beth Leatherdale. Illustrated by Drew Shannon.

<https://www.kidscanpress.com/product/you-can-be-an-activist/>

With Children

Recent recommendations from Spencer Miller:

The Kids Book of Black History in Canada, by Rosemary Sadlier (2024). From Mathieu da Costa to Black Lives Matter, this is 400 years of history and treasure trove of stories. This is an update of the original 2003 edition.

<https://www.kidscanpress.com/product/the-kids-book-of-black-history-in-canada/>

The Longest Shot: How Larry Kwong Changed the Face of Hockey, by Chad Soon and George Chiang and illustrated by Amy Qi (2024).

Born in Vernon, BC, Larry Kwong was the first person of Asian descent to play hockey in the NHL.

<https://www.orcabook.com/The-Longest-Shot>

The Antiracist Kitchen: 21 Stories (and Recipes) Just as it sounds: authors share stories of food, culture and resistance. Lifts up the role of food in reclaiming culture and resisting discrimination. Edited by Nadia L. Hohn and illustrated by (2024).

<https://www.orcabook.com/The-Antiracist-Kitchen>



For more recommendations for children, [click here.](#)

No Matter Who Wins

An assemblage poem by Rebecca Faulkner

I won't give up
wave to passing cars embrace
to less news & more music
No matter who wins
I will live lightly on the land
those closest to me listen
stand up
for what I believe in
I will continue
to fight
solar panels will keep generating electricity
No matter who wins
I will still ride my bike
share my story
keep working for justice & human rights
I will continue
through animation & music to decarbonize my
community
to restore the wildlife habitat where I live
No matter who wins
make kindness my priority
I will advocate for individuals living with mental illness
be the best grandmother
No matter who wins I will champion reproductive rights
with respect & kindness
be mindful of water usage
treat others I'll continue to fight
advocate for gender equality
help build a more peaceful world be respectful of others
No matter who wins I will support my family friends &
neighbors
speak
with respect & empathy
champion humility
No matter who wins I will smile at people
I won't hide
from difficult things
I will stay positive
organize for peace racial equity & social justice
I will continue
I will show up
to plant trees
No matter who wins
make art
continue to love
No matter who wins

Listen & Watch Online

Rewilding A Forest – a film about Artist and Poet Maria "Vildhjarta" Westerberg. This is the film shared Friday night of the CUC's Co-lab experience back in November. How one person's search for their individual wellbeing led to ecological wellbeing.

[https://youtu.be/C5ozGHIK03A?
si=PTYNOanr_Yonz6mC](https://youtu.be/C5ozGHIK03A?si=PTYNOanr_Yonz6mC)

From wise elder Joanna Macy comes a 10 episode podcast about the Great Turning. Try the second episode to learn about the Great Turning story.

[https://resources.soundstrue.com/podcast/
s1-ep2-we-are-the-great-turning-podcast/](https://resources.soundstrue.com/podcast/s1-ep2-we-are-the-great-turning-podcast/)

Christi Belcourt "The Revolution Has Begun" Keynote address by the Michif artist.

[https://youtu.be/XqBXDPzyLm0?
si=8e3XfSM7IKAhPyG](https://youtu.be/XqBXDPzyLm0?si=8e3XfSM7IKAhPyG)

Inspiring Stories from Canada Helps

[https://www.canadahelps.org/en/giving-
life/youth-activists-changing-the-world/](https://www.canadahelps.org/en/giving-life/youth-activists-changing-the-world/)

If you are on Instagram or Tiktok, use your time to follow and uplift activists like Zhaawnong Webb and Autumn Peltier.

**I believe that all organizing is
science fiction - that we are
shaping the future we long
for and have not yet
experienced.**

adrienne maree brown

In Focus: Our Actions

Active engagement can take many forms, not just letter writing and showing up at protests (as important as those are). Speaking up at a family gathering or at work is a form of active engagement. Donating money is a form of engagement -- after all, money is an expression of our life energy and how we share our money shows our values. Putting a red dress or an orange shirt or a pride banner in the window is a form of active engagement. As is wearing a button. What forms of active engagement are as natural for you as breathing? What forms are harder for you?

Whatever actions you engage in, it's helpful to engage in some sort of reflection. Taking time to reflect will help you get the most out of your own learning. Reflection will also help you to show up in a good way next time. You can do the reflection on your own or with some trusted friend(s). If you are new to online journaling, take a look in your app store -- there are some great apps that make online journaling easy and fun.

Here is a format for a small group reflection, from the UU Ministry for the Earth:

<https://www.uumfe.org/support-for-activists/action-reflection-circles/>

Environmental Actions

Check out "[My Climate Plan](#)," co-founded by UU Minister Reilly Yeo.

The following organizations were mentioned by Reilly Yeo in her Active Engagement sermon:

- [Common Horizon/Horizon Commun](#)
- [Neighbours United](#)
- [Reconnection Project](#)

Grow a "transition hub" group in your area to build community resilience for a low carbon future: <https://transitionnetwork.org/>

From the pages of history

After the WWII, Lotta Hitschmanova led Canadian UUs in a cross-canada effort to provide support to those in war-torn countries.

<https://lotta56sparks.ca/lotta-unitarian-connection-part2/>

UU Community Actions

Read about Nanaimo's shelter. The First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo started it as an Emergency Weather shelter in partnership with the City. The fellowship ran the shelter for many years. Now, in a healthy evolution, the shelter has found a home with the Nanaimo Family Life Association:

<https://www.nanaimobulletin.com/local-news/renovated-unitarian-shelter-in-nanaimo-officially-unveiled-7437114>

First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa is working with Indigenous Partners to build affordable housing:

<https://www.ontarioaboriginalhousing.ca/news/first-unitarian-ottawa-and-partners-unveil-plans-for-odayanhaway-a-little-village-of-sustainable-and-affordable-housing>

In Focus: Action & Embodiment

In discussing why we have not been able to overcome oppression, Resmaa Menakem, trauma therapist and author of *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* says:

It's not that we've been lazy or insincere. But we've focused our efforts in the wrong direction. We've tried to teach our brains to think better about race. But white-body supremacy doesn't live in our thinking brains. It lives and breathes in our bodies. Our bodies have a form of knowledge that is different from our cognitive brains. This knowledge is typically experienced as a felt sense of constriction or expansion, pain or ease, energy or numbness. Often this knowledge is stored in our bodies as wordless stories about what is safe and what is dangerous. The body is where we fear, hope, and react; where we constrict and release; and where we reflexively fight, flee, or freeze. If we are to upend the status quo of white-body supremacy, we must begin with our bodies.

When I (Karen) find myself unable to intervene in a helpful way -- when I find myself frozen or when I find myself calling out instead of calling in -- in that moment, I am experiencing a bodily reaction. Learning to work with our bodies is an important part of working for justice. Colonialism and oppression affect us all -- what is often called 'white privilege' is an injury designed to keep those of us who are white uncomfortable with racial justice work. The so-called privileges are the cheese in the trap and the trap catches everyone -- the white people who are discomfited and make the conversation about themselves, and everyone else in the movement, who feels compelled to make the white person comfortable.

There are so many reasons why we might feel uncomfortable with our bodies -- social stigma, fat phobia, neurotypical ways of doing things . . . as Unitarian Universalists we are called to create beloved community and this means doing the work, individually and communally, of extricating ourselves as best we can from all the barriers that keep us separated. This is 8th principle work, dismantling oppression. It is the work of this time.

Singing to Unravel what is Taut

#1009 Meditation on Breathing, by Sarah Dan Jones

<https://youtu.be/u2T9wwc7gYQ?si=vUs6yYXMmcPnmKIS>

Loosen, by Aly Halpert

https://youtu.be/Biv9Yh_z4QU?si=qagZBixnBQ6pCmls

Take a chance, make a change, by Wendy Luella Perkins

<https://www.tiktok.com/@wendyluellaperkins/video/7334713214468558085>

December Printable: What Does Your Body Need?

By Abby Vanmuijen. Check out her website: <https://www.avanmuijen.com/>

WHAT IS MY BODY TELLING ME IT NEEDS RIGHT NOW?

FEAR

I NEED: A GREATER SENSE OF SAFETY

- TO TAKE A BREATH OR CHANGE MY BREATHING
- TO DISCHARGE ENERGY
- NOTE - SHAKE - GUMT
- TO LEAVE OR BE FURTHER AWAY
- TO SLOW DOWN TO SPEED UP
- TO GROUND IN THE PRESENT
- TO FIND AN EXIT
- SOMETHING ELSE: _____

ANGER

I NEED: SOMETHING TO MOVE OR CHANGE

- MORE INFORMATION, CLARITY OR UNDERSTANDING
- TO BE HEARD/NOTICED
- TO SAY "NO"
- TO SET A NEW BOUNDARY
- TO DISCHARGE ENERGY
- ~ SQUEEZE - YELL - MOVE ~
- A SNACK/MORE GLUCOSE
- SOMETHING ELSE: _____

SADNESS

I NEED: CONNECTION TO SELF, OTHERS OR PURPOSE

- TO REST TO SLEEP
- A BREAK TO BE DONE
- ATTENTION
- CONSENSUAL PHYSICAL TOUCH
- ~ A HUG - A SNUGGLE - A PAIN ~
- TO CRY FRIENDSHIP
- TO REMEMBER
- SOMETHING ELSE: _____

DISGUST

I NEED: SUPPORT CONSUMING/DIGESTING/METABOLIZING THAT

- TO RELEASE SOMETHING
- TO THINK ABOUT/SHARE SOMETHING GIVING DISCOMFORT
- TO INVESTIGATE SOMETHING FOR MYSELF
- TO SUSPEND JUDGEMENT
- ~ MY OWN - SOMEONE ELSE'S ~
- TO TALK ABOUT/SHARE SOMETHING GIVING DISCOMFORT
- SOMETHING ELSE: _____

JOY

MY NEEDS ARE MET IN THIS MOMENT

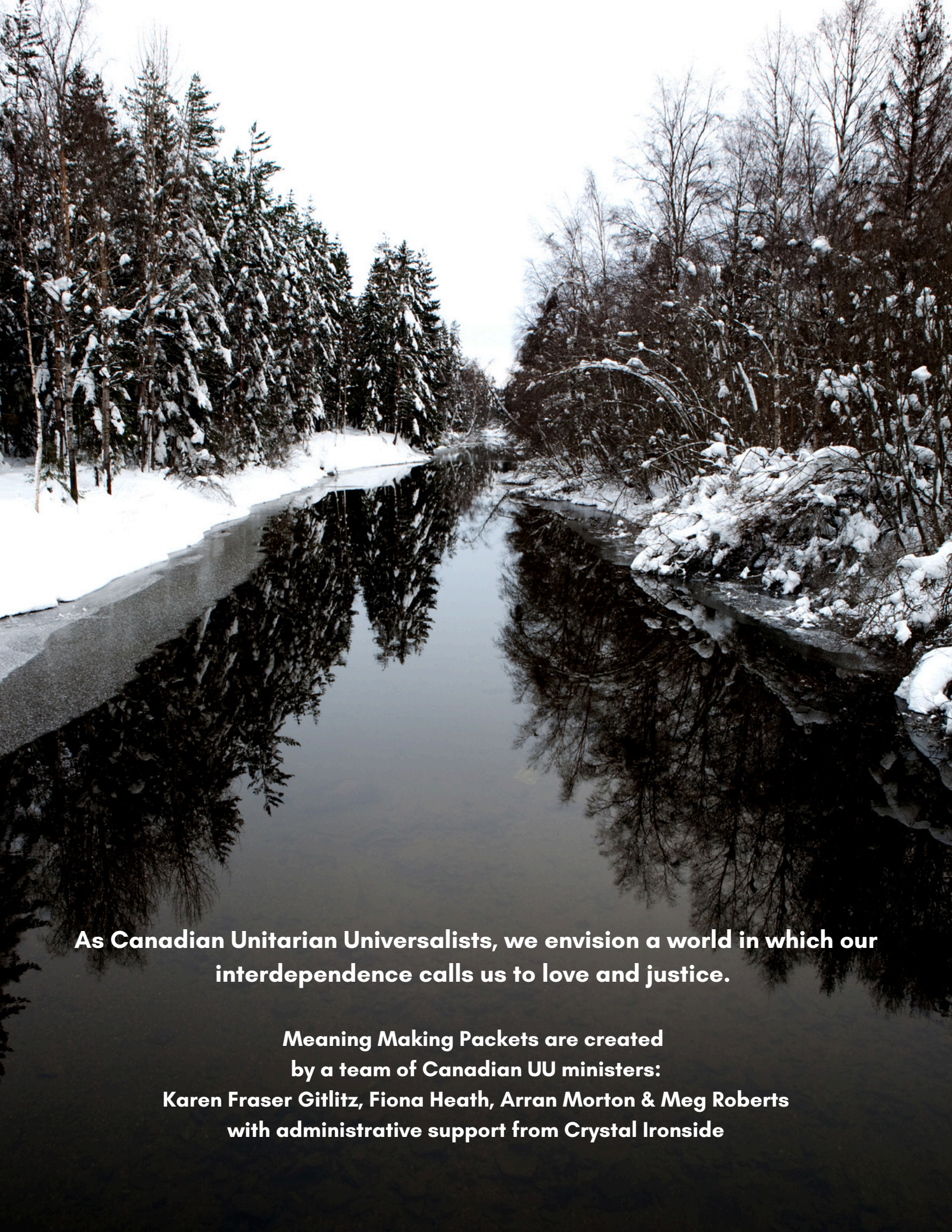
- SAVOR IT
- SHARE IT
- CELEBRATE!
- REST
- REMEMBER THIS FOR LATER
- SOMETHING ELSE: _____

GENIUS

I NEED: TO EXPRESS MYSELF

- TO MAKE SOMETHING
- TO SING TO DANCE
- TO PLAY TO EXPLORE
- TO TAKE ACTION TO WRITE
- TO UNDERSTAND MORE DEEPLY
- SOMETHING ELSE: _____

@AVANMUIJEN



As Canadian Unitarian Universalists, we envision a world in which our interdependence calls us to love and justice.

**Meaning Making Packets are created
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