



South Fraser Unitarian Congregation



Love and Justice

Soul Matters Thematic Packet
February 2017

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A Note from the Minister

Welcome to our first month of using Soul Matters – a Small Group Ministry model that has caught on with over 200 congregations in the US and close to 20 in Canada.

This month our Soul Matters Sharing Circles provide an opportunity to explore the Canadian Unitarian Council's (CUC) Sharing Our Faith theme centered around the new vision statement adopted at the Annual Conference and Meeting in Vancouver in May, 2016: we envision a world where our interdependence calls us to love and justice. This packet includes a number of their worship resources and quotes, as well as other resources included in the Sharing Our Faith packet.

The following is an excerpt from the CUC's Sharing Our Faith packet created by the Rev. Fiona Heath, former CUC Board member and Chair of the Vision Task Force. It is supported by material from Canadian UU ministers and individual Unitarians.

"The 2017 Sharing Our Faith package focuses on love and justice. We, as Canadian Unitarian Universalists, envision **a world in which our interdependence calls us to love and justice**. This vision for Canadian Unitarian Universalism was affirmed at the CUC Annual General Meeting in May, 2016. Arising from the foundational theology of our seventh principle, "respect for the interdependent web of all existence", this vision asks us to live this principle through actions of love and justice.

We are beginning to learn to live interdependently, to care for water and air as essential to life, to be inclusive of all kinds of people, to be aware of how each action we take ripples out into the world. Embodying the experience of connection may take a lifetime to learn, to truly live in the radical interconnectivity of all that is.

As we live from an ethic of interdependence, we hear the call of love and justice. The world needs – now more than ever – human societies based on loving connection not hate and division. Seeking justice for all people helps grow a loving, sustainable system."

What is Soul Matters?

You may be wondering what Soul Matters is. Like other small group programs, its central goal is to foster circles of trust and deep listening. However, Soul Matters adds four unique components:

1. Explore the Worship Themes in More Depth

Soul Matters is not a "stand alone" program. It is designed as a companion program to a congregation's worship experience. Congregations using Soul Matters position it in their system as "an opportunity to explore our congregation's monthly worship themes in more depth."

2. Experience the Worship Theme, Don't Just Talk about It.

Unitarian Universalists want to do more than just read and talk about spiritual topics. Discussing a topic is important. But there is nothing like experiential learning. Honoring this, Soul Matters participants are given a spiritual exercise each month to engage prior to their group meeting. For instance, when we wrestled with the concept of grace, small group participants not only read what theologians have to say about it, but are challenged to find a way to bring grace (a gift one doesn't expect, earn or even deserve) into another person's life.

3. Questions To Walk With, Not Talk Through.

In traditional small groups, questions are an opportunity for the group to think together. Soul Matters uses questions differently. We see them as tools for individual exploration. Instead of asking our groups to go through the questions and discussion them one by one, Soul Matters participants are asked to read all the questions ahead of time and find the one question that "hooks them"—the one that speaks to and challenges them personally. Participants then live with--or "walk with"--that question for a couple weeks leading up to the group, coming to their meeting, not with an answer to each of the questions on the list, but with a story about how this one particular question lead them to deeper, personal learning. This technique leads us away from abstraction and intellectualizing and challenges us to think about how the topic (and question) apply to our daily living.

4. A Reminder That UUism is Distinctive, Not an "Anything Goes," Religion

Our monthly themes are not just interesting topics. Rather they focus us on a spiritual value that our UU faith has historically honored and emphasized. At each meeting, we are reminded that our faith promotes a preferred way for us to be in the world.

At the start of each month, a resource packet will be made available via hard copy, on our website, and through the Chalice Lighter. Resource packets include articles, poems, quotes, questions to wrestle with, and spiritual exercises all related to the theme. Of course, if you have material related to the theme, you'll be encouraged and invited to submit them to Rev. Samaya for inclusion into the packet. The services during the month will be related to the theme in some way shape or form – it could be as simple as a chalice lighting that folds in the theme, or the entire service.

At the end of the month we'll hold a small group discussion circle, called Soul Matters, that will be facilitated by Rev. Samaya. If we continue with thematic ministry in the 2017-2018 church year, it is hoped that there will be several small groups that meet. Facilitators of these small groups would naturally arise out of those who attend the small group discussion circles in the pilot program period – from February to May in 2017.

Please feel free to contact Rev. Samaya for more information.

Spiritual Practice – Practices of Love and Justice

Option A

As Canadian Unitarians we envision a world in which **our interdependence calls us to love and justice**. Arising from the foundational theology of our seventh principle, “respect for the interdependent web of all existence”, this vision asks us to live this principle through actions of love and justice.

We are beginning to learn to live interdependently, to care for water and air as essential to life, to be inclusive of all kinds of people, to be aware of how each action we take ripples out into the world. Embodying the experience of connection may take a lifetime to learn, to truly live in the radical interconnectivity of all that is.

Each day read through the vision statement - as Canadian Unitarians we envision a world in which **our interdependence calls us to love and justice** - and reflect on how both words are verbs. Keep a journal — write down examples of your observations on the theme.

Where do you see love and justice enacted in your own life? Be aware of living examples of love and justice as you read the newspaper, browse the internet, watch television, interact with friends and neighbors, go to church or work at your job.

Option B

Our understanding of justice is often based on how we perceive others, which can be warped by stereotypes. How have your impressions of Indigenous people been shaped by your upbringing (whether you are non-Indigenous, Indigenous, or multi-cultural)? Think back to when you were growing up: What did you know about Indigenous peoples? Who did it learn it from?

If you would like to help stimulate your thinking, watch the Thomas King’s video entitled, *I’m Not the Indian You Had in Mind* (5:28). Thomas King is a novelist and also more recently wrote the non-fiction work *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*. He wrote and directed this short video, *I’m Not the Indian You Had in Mind*. In Thomas King’s words, the film “challenges the stereotypical portrayal First Nations peoples in the media. This spoken word short offers an insight of how First Nations people today are changing old ideas and empowering themselves in the greater community.”

Watch the video, and then either on your own (writing in a diary or making some personal notes afterwards), or with a trusted friend (spend time talking about):

- What stereotypes of Aboriginal people did you grow up with?
- Where there any surprising moments in the video when you recognized a stereotype you still hold, and if so what was it?

- How might these impressions affect your ability to engage in dialogue about the history of colonization, including the Residential School system in Canada, and its effects?

Come back to the group with something you learned about how our upbringing can affect our understanding and experience with what is involved in the process of reconciliation.

Option C

Bishop Carlos Belo, East Timorese Catholic Priest, 1996 Nobel Peace Prize Winner said, “Justice from Love, and Love from Justice.” How have you experienced “justice from love, and love from justice”? Spend at least 15 minutes thinking and/or journaling on those experiences in your own life. Come back to the sharing circle with a few thoughts about doing this spiritual exercise and how it has influenced how you understand love and justice in the world.

Option D

Each day, read through the vision statement – “as Canadian Unitarians we envision a world in which **our interdependence calls us to love and justice**” – and spend five minutes in silence after speaking the statement out loud along with this prayer of commitment.

Prayer of commitment¹

There is too much hardship in this world to not find joy, every day

There is too much injustice in this world to not right the balance, every day

There is too much pain in this world to not heal, every day

We each minister to a weary world. For today, I commit to do that which calls me to make this world more loving, more compassionate and more filled with the grace of divine presence, every moment.

Consider memorizing this affirmation and meditating on it as you go about the tasks of this week.

Option E

Visualization Exercise, Thich Nhat Hanh

Do this exercise a few times over the month:

Get comfortable on your chair. Settle into your body. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Breathe out three times.

¹ Darcy Roake, adapted

See yourself holding a round, orange tangerine that slowly changes into a blossom on a tangerine tree.

Sense how the tree is bathed in the light of the golden sun and then covered with soft cool rain.

Notice how the blossom becomes a small green fruit that grows into the orange tangerine.

See and smell the tangerine in your hand.

Breathe out one time.

Imagine yourself peeling the tangerine and eating a piece of it, knowing that as you do so, you are being part of the sun, the rain, the tree, and all of the Creation.

Take one last deep breath and then open your eyes.

Come to the sharing circle with a few thoughts about doing this spiritual exercise this month.

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 our Soul Matters meeting on Sunday, February 19th after the service prepared to share with the group something of what came up for you.

1. Who showed you the relationship between love and justice when you were growing up?
2. Unitarians draw on the source "words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love." Who are those prophetic women and men that have inspired you and do inspire you?
3. Sometimes we know about justice because of the transforming power of love in our lives. Whose love has helped you believe that the world can be a fairer, kinder place? What actions have they inspired you to do?
4. Sometimes we know about love and justice because we have experienced when they have both been absent. Can you think of such a time in your life or in the life of someone you care about? How did it influence you to live as a result?
5. The arts have a powerful influence in our culture. What book, film, poem, song, or other creative expression has influenced how you think about love and justice?
6. How does God show you how to live love and justice in your life? What has been your response?

Story – The Dervish in the Ditch

This story is found in a number of sources, including From Once Upon a Time... Storytelling to Teach Character and Prevent Bullying by Elisa Davy Pearmain; Doorways to the Soul: 52 Wisdom Tales from Around the World, edited by Elisa Pearmain (Pilgrim Press).

Once upon a time, in a land to the east, a Dervish holy man and his student were walking from one village to the next. Suddenly they saw a great huge cloud of dust rising in the distance. They stood and stared at a grand carriage, pulled by six horses approaching at a full gallop. Riding on top were two liveries dressed in red, each holding a rein. The Dervish and the young student soon realized that the carriage was not going to slow down, let alone veer to the side to avoid hitting them. The carriage was coming at such a speed that they had to throw themselves from the road and jump into a ditch to save themselves. Covered with dirt and grass, the two men got up. They looked after the carriage as it sped away into the distance.

The student was first to respond. He began to call out and curse the drivers. But the teacher ran ahead of him, cupped his hands over his mouth, and called to the carriage: "May all of your deepest desires be satisfied!"

The student stared at his teacher and asked, "Why would you wish that their deepest desires be satisfied? Those men nearly killed us!"

The old Dervish replied, "Do you think all their deepest desires are satisfied? If they were happy, would they be so thoughtless and cruel as to nearly run down an old man and his student?"

The younger man had no answer, for he was deep in thought. And so, in silence, the two continued their journey down the dusty road.

Readings about Love and Justice

Reading No. 597 – Love Versus Hate - Singing the Living Tradition

Never does hatred cease by hating in return;
Only through love can hatred come to an end.
Victory breeds hatred,
The conquered dwell in sorrow and resentment.
They who give up all thought of victory or defeat,
May be calm and live happily at peace.
Let us overcome violence by gentleness;
Let us overcome evil by good;
Let us overcome miserly by liberality;
Let us overcome the liar by truth.

Dhammapada

Love and Justice by Rev. Naomi King (adapted)

This is a time of trial.

But if we are among the love people, the folk called to be part of changing the world without hate, we have much work, much spiritual, legal, practical, and relational work to do.

Love is not about drawing in and drawing smaller circles. That does not keep hate out or turn hate away. Love asks us to be bold and risky and vulnerable and faithful to these amazing promises we have made.

We're still in this together. Our neighbors are still everyone in the whole world, those neighbors we are called to love, including the ones that are angry and afraid or that we who have suffered violence from hatred have learned to fear.

How do we go forward? Same as before and also more: more organization, more effort, more faithful risk especially to create sanctuary and protect those most in danger. Love and Justice have been our calling in other times of hatred in the past, one that we often struggled to embrace because this is difficult and painful as well as astounding and beautiful work. Love and Justice were our calling in the middle of hate made manifest before this election. Love and Justice are our calling now.

Love unite us, guide us, strengthen us, encourage us for the way ahead. Love hold us, comfort us, & help us risk making way & welcome for all in need. Love challenge us each & every day to meet hate & challenge & change it. Love carry us on & let us be your voice singing as we work for change. Love carry us on & let us be your hands making a more generous world. Love carry us on & let us be part of the way of healing & hope now & forward.

Reading: Two-way Street by Susan Ruttan

A precious moment for me this year was bobbing for apples at a church Halloween party, with the mother of our Syrian refugee family, Ramza, bobbing right next to me. We were both hopeless at it, but laughing like crazy at the silliness of it all. Supporting Ramza's family this past year has enriched the lives of those of us involved, while it has given the family a new, safe home. That's how interdependence works – it's a two-way street, giving and receiving, that leads to deeper relationships with people everywhere.

Interdependence is the heart of who we are as Canadian Unitarian Universalists. The word interdependence is the core of our new vision statement, and it takes us many places – to social justice, global crises, respect for the planet, and to the bonds between Canadian UUs. As our vision statement says, it leads us to commit ourselves to love and justice.

It's a word worth celebrating and pondering, but it's also a challenge. We have work to do to live up to this vision statement. Within our congregations, we must seek ways to build closer ties with one another, including newcomers. Beyond that, we need to connect with other Canadian congregations, sharing our support, ideas and love. And beyond that, of course, is a world that needs us.

Susan Ruttan is a CUC Board member, and member of the Unitarian Church of Edmonton

Quotes About Love and Justice

"We are called to *embody* interdependence, to give our principles substance through our actions and the physical world in which we act." *Keith Wilkinson, CUC Board of Trustees*

"Look more deeply, and you will see yourself as multitudes, penetrating everywhere, interbeing with everyone and everything." *Thich Nhat Hanh*

"We can either emphasize those aspects of our traditions, religious or secular, that speak of hatred, exclusion, and suspicion *or* work with those that stress the interdependence and equality of all human beings. The choice is yours." *Karen Armstrong, Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*

The end of the Cold War removed the immediate causes of whole destruction -- but not the threat contained in our knowledge. We must tame this knowledge with the ideals of justice, caring, and compassion summoned from our common human spiritual and moral heritage, if we are to live in peace and serenity in the twenty-first century. *Mahnaz Afkhami*

Without justice and love, peace will always be the great illusion. *Archbishop Hélder Pessoa Câmara*

Videos and Online Material

Here's a video with Martin Luther King, Jr. talking about love and power: Click [here](#) to watch it if you are reading this material online. If you are reading a hard copy, simply Google, "martin luther king on love and power", when you are next online.

The Dalai Lama on Interdependence: Click [here](#) to watch it if you are reading this material online. If you are reading a hard copy, simply Google, "The Dalai Lama on Interdependence", when you are next online.

Cornel West on "Justice is What Love Looks Like in Public": Click [here](#) if you are reading this material online. If you are reading a hard copy, simply Google, "Cornel West: Justice is What Love Looks Like in Public", when you are next online.

Stories for Children

“The Great Kapok Tree” by Lynne Cherry - “One day, a man exhausts himself trying to chop down a giant kapok tree. While he sleeps, the forest’s residents, including a child from the Yanomamo tribe, whisper in his ear about the importance of trees and how “all living things depend on one another” . . . and it works.”

“Earth Mother” by Ellen Jackson - “The circle of life turns in unexpected ways. Earth Mother awakes with the dawn. As she walks the land, swims the seas, and climbs the mountains, nurturing all of creation, she comes across Man, Frog, and Mosquito. They each give her thanks for nature’s bounty, yet can’t help but give her advice about making their lives better. Everybody’s got an opinion, it seems, and Earth Mother is amused when it becomes clear that the circle of life is not without a healthy dose of cosmic humor.”

Films About Love and Justice

Gandhi: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi remains one of the most lauded crusaders for social, economic and political justice because of his successful, nonviolent revolution against British colonials.

Philadelphia: This groundbreaking film holds the distinction of being one of the very first mainstream American movies to address homophobia and HIV/AIDS.

Erin Brockovich: Like any real story making its way to Tinseltown, not everything about Erin Brockovich is necessarily Erin Brockovich herself.

Gran Torino: Disgruntled Korean War veteran Walt Kowalski sets out to reform his neighbor, a Hmong teenager who tried to steal Kowalski's prized possession: a 1972 Gran Torino.

The Son: A joinery instructor at a rehab center refuses to take a new teen as his apprentice, but then begins to follow the boy through the hallways and streets.

Brother Number One: Through Rob Hamill’s personal story, Brother Number One explores one of the “forgotten” genocides of the 20th century, examining how and why nearly 2 million Cambodians could be killed by a fanatical regime known as the Khmer Rouge.

Books on Love and Justice (fiction and non-fiction)

***The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini** - The unforgettable, heartbreaking story of the unlikely friendship between a wealthy boy and the son of his father’s servant, *The Kite Runner* is a beautifully crafted novel set in a country that is in the process of being destroyed. It is about the power of reading, the price of betrayal, and the possibility of

redemption; and an exploration of the power of fathers over sons—their love, their sacrifices, their lies.

Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom – Mitch Albom had that second chance. He rediscovered Morrie, his college professor and mentor over twenty years ago, in the last months of the older man's life. Knowing he was dying of ALS - or motor neurone disease - Mitch visited Morrie in his study every Tuesday, just as they used to back in college. Their rekindled relationship turned into one final 'class': lessons in how to live.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon – Christopher John Francis Boone knows all the countries of the world and their capitals and every prime number up to 7,057. He relates well to animals but has no understanding of human emotions. He cannot stand to be touched. And he detests the color yellow. After his neighbor's dog, Wellington, is killed and his carefully constructive universe is threatened. Christopher sets out to solve the murder in the style of his favourite (logical) detective, Sherlock Holmes.

Future Themes

Looking forward into the year, we'll be covering the following themes:

- March is Simplicity
- April is Resistance
- May is Compassion

In the meantime, if you have any poems, books, quotes, movies to suggest on the theme of Love and Justice please submit them to Rev. Samaya for Wednesday, February 22nd to be included in March's packet on Simplicity.