



# South Fraser Unitarian Congregation



*A People of Promise*

SFUC Thematic Packet  
September 2017

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## A Note from the Minister

When promises are broken,  
“we forgive ourselves and each other.  
We begin again in Love.”

Singing the Living Tradition, #637

Despite my best intentions, I continually find myself breaking the promises I make to myself, to others, and to the groups I belong to. We all do – I have come to understand it’s part of being human and having the privilege of living on this planet.

Each time a group gets together in our UU circles, we covenant – we make promises to each other – promises that we fully intend to live out in our lives and in our time with each other. Each time we make those promises, power is at work and at play – perhaps the greatest power of all. It’s what I love about being a Unitarian Universalist – the promises we make with each other is one of the foundations of our faith.

“It is common for UUs to say we were born inherently good and powerful rather than inherently weak and depraved. What is not so common is remembering that this capacity for strength and goodness is rooted in our ability to make promises. Whereas other religious traditions focus on confession or right belief, we’ve always placed our hope in the act of making and keeping commitments. This is what is at stake in proclaiming that we are covenantal rather than creedal faith. If a new day is to come, it will arrive not when we all think alike, but when we all follow through on our commitments to love our neighbor as ourselves. If salvation is possible, it will be realized not from us noticing our need to be cleansed, but from waking up to our need to be connected. If divinity is real, we will know it not in the form of a supernatural moment, but in those everyday miracles when we look into each other’s eyes and say, “You can count on me to...” Grace is not a reward for good behavior, it is the sacred and creative power that arises when two or more entwine their lives in mutual commitment. Again, there is power in a promise.

And what about the promise that life itself makes to us? This too is central to our faith. From our beginnings, we have declared life to be full of promise and potential, even when darkness seems to dominate our days. So we commit to keeping our eyes open. Trust in life and others, and life and others will prove themselves trustworthy. Shift your gaze from what you *want* to what you *have* and suddenly life is generous rather than a threat. To paraphrase Brian Andreas, say yes and life will start to dance.

So who needs a promise from you this month? What commitment is it time for you to renew? What power is waiting to be released by the simple phrase, “You can count on me to...”? And maybe most important of all, are you ready to say yes and watch life dance?”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Soul Matters Packet

Join us on Sunday, September 24<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 at the home of Rev. Samaya for our monthly themed small group ministry discussion circle. Come prepared to talk about your experience engaging in one of the spiritual practices listed in this packet.

## What is Theme Ministry?

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

### 1. **Explore the Worship Themes in More Depth**

Theme ministry is not a “stand-alone” program. It is designed as a companion program to a congregation’s worship experience. Congregations using theme ministry 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, our thematic package provides participants with 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. Theme ministry 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, 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. People come 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.

## 5. 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.

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

## Spiritual Practice – Promise

*Please choose one of the following spiritual practices to engage in and be prepared to discuss your experience at our theme small group ministry on Sunday, September 27<sup>th</sup> at the home of Rev. Samaya Oakley. The meeting will start at 4:00, after which people are invited to stay for a potluck dinner. Soup and buns will be available.*

### Keep A Promise...To Yourself!

It's the promise we most often forget, or maybe it's better to say it's the promise we most often sacrifice. We are often so good at keeping our commitments to others and yet fall flat on our face when it comes to the commitments we make to ourselves. And if we can't keep our promises to ourselves, how will we ever keep our promises to each other? The commitments we make to ourselves serve as the foundation for the pledges we make to those around us. If we break our commitments to personal physical health, we sacrifice the strength to support others. If we cheat on our promises to personal spiritual health, we lose our ability to serve and see needs greater than our own. Those who can't promise kindness and forgiveness to themselves are rarely able to extend kindness and forgiveness to others.

Our spiritual exercise this month honors this sacred interdependence between staying true to oneself and staying true to those around us. Here is your challenge:

Read these two articles:

- [Eleven promises you should Make Yourself](#), and
- [Promises to Yourself](#)

Identify one of the promises they mention that most resonates with you. Which promise calls to you the most? Which promise is your heart most hungry for? What promise have you wanted to keep to yourself, but regularly break?

Find a way to keep that promise front and center. Print it out and tape it to your office desk. Put it in your wallet or your purse. Write it in lipstick on your bathroom mirror.

Spend the month keeping it! Give yourself the gift of finally following through.

**Come to your group ready to share your experience, what you learned about yourself and how the month was different because you remained true.**

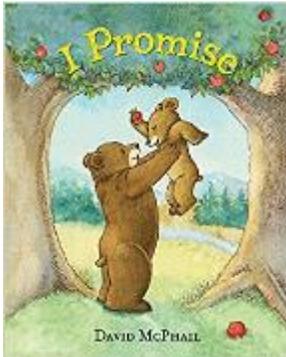
### Questions To Live With

*As always, don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply find **the one** that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. And then come to the thematic small group meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.*

1. If someone secretly monitored your life for a month, what would they conclude is your most sacred vow?
2. It's been said that our very humanity lies in the way we carry out our promises. How have you made yourself more human through a promise? What promise is asking you to renew your humanity right now?
3. What promises have you made to your spiritual life? We keep our commitment each day to work and earning cash? Why do the promises to our soul and spirit often take second seat?
4. Watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvlPa28cVfA>. And ask yourself, "What promise can I make to love reaching out?"
5. What promise in your life needs to be broken? Are you keeping a commitment that is keeping you in a cage?
6. Do you still need to forgive yourself for breaking a promise?
7. When promises are broken, how good are you at "beginning again in love"? Has your ability to trust survived all those promises that went unfulfilled?
8. It's been said that we promise according to our hopes, and perform according to our fears. Is there a fear in your life right now that is getting in the way of a promise you want to make?
9. Do you over-promise? When you offer others your commitment, do they take it with a grain of salt? Are you ready to do something to change that? Do you even know why you do it?
10. Has time and age changed how you think about making promises? Are you slower or quicker to make commitments? Have your commitments grown narrower or more broad?

11. When was the last time you said “Yes!” and then watched the world take your hand and dance?

## For Families of All Ages and Sizes

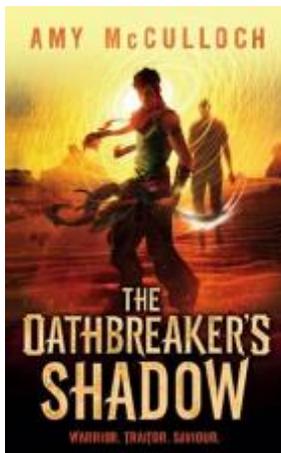


### Children's Book of the Month

*I Promise* by David McPhail

“What's a promise?”

When Baby Bear asks Mother Bear this important question, she promises her cub that she will feed him, play with him, and do everything she can to keep him safe. But Baby Bear has more questions: What happens if you break a promise? Can his mother promise that he will always be happy?



### Youth Book of the Month

*Oathbreaker's Shadow* by Amy McCulloch

In the world of fifteen-year-old Raim, you tie a knot for every promise you make. Break that promise and the knot will burst into flames, scarring your skin and forever marking you as an oathbreaker. Raim has worn a simple knot around his wrist for as long as he can remember. No one seems to know where it came from or which promise it symbolizes, and Raim barely thinks about it at all--especially not since he became the most promising young fighter ever to train for the elite Yun guard. But on the day that he binds his life to that of his best friend (and the future king), Khareh, the rope ignites and sears a dark mark into his skin. Scarred now as an oathbreaker, Raim has two options: run or be killed. He chooses to run, taking refuge in the vast desert among a colony of exiled oathbreakers. Will he be able to learn the skills he needs to clear his name? And even if he can, how can he keep a promise he never knew he made in the first place?

### Family Discussion

- What promises or agreements does your family have?
- What happens if you break a promise?
- Is a promise sacred?

### Activity

Create a family agreement. What promises does your family hold most dear? Maybe make a poster or piece of art to capture them.



## UU Children's Promises

The UU Principles are often referred to as Promises in Children's Religious Exploration. Here is a [song](#) about them that we are going to learn.

## Quotes on Promises

### Singing the Living Tradition Reading No. 569

Stand By This Faith

Stand by this faith. Work for it and sacrifice for it.

*There is nothing in all the world so important as to be loyal to this faith which has placed before us the loftiest ideals,*

Which has comforted us in sorrow, strengthened us for noble duty and made the world beautiful.

*Do not demand immediate results but rejoice that we are worthy to be entrusted with this great message,*

That you are strong enough to work for a great true principle without counting the cost.

*Go on finding ever new applications of these truths and new enjoyments in their contemplation, always trusting in the one God which ever lives and loves.*

Olympia Brown

**Definition:** Promise, noun: a declaration that something will or will not be done, given, etc.; indication of future achievement. Synonyms: word, pledge, oath, covenant, commitment, potential, talent, possibility

Promise, verb: to afford ground for expectation. Synonyms: pledge, vow, agree, commit,

“Promise is a big word. It either makes something or breaks everything”

Anonymous

“...a covenant might be implicit, expressed by silent consent as people walk together and show concern for one another. But an explicit covenant is far better ... for reminding the members of their mutual duty and stirring them up to it. ... there is something to be said for the word *covenant*, ... It emphasizes that the church is a community of mutual obligation, which involves a sense of commitment. Even the freest of free churches needs that much discipline if it is to last long enough to accomplish anything of value in this world.”

Conrad Wright

“Human beings are at our best when we make solemn promises to one another and try hard to keep them. We are the only animal that makes promises: we are a promise-making, promise-keeping, promise-breaking, promise-renewing creatures. Our very humanity lies in the way we carry out our promises to our families, our coworkers, our neighbors, and our fellow members of the human family...to be genuine, a covenant must be a covenant of being. It’s not just about good words, but about *actions*.”

Dennis McCarthy on James Luther Adams

Unless commitment is made, there are only hopes; but no plans.

Peter F. Drucker

When promises are broken, “we forgive ourselves and each other. We begin again in Love.”  
Singing the Living Tradition, #637

“We must find ways to access knowledge that is in danger of being lost. ... We’re living in an age when our daily life is dominated by the [dullness of the] marketplace. ... The awareness that our intimate relationships are filled with meaning, that we are connected to and depend on the earth, that we have interests transcending our own personal lives – these dimensions are not factored into the values of the marketplace. ... [We must resist this.] We must remember...that we have received abundantly in our lives and that our presence matters. We must remember that we are a blessing- [that we are full of promise.]”

Rev. Rebecca Parker

When did the future switch from being a promise to being a threat?

Chuck Palahniuk

Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build bridges even when there are no rivers.

Nikita Khrushchev

We promise according to our hopes, and perform according to our fears.

François VI de la Rochefoucault

The one who promises everything is sure to fulfill nothing.

Carl Jung

Those that are most slow in making a promise are the most faithful in the performance of it.  
Jean Jacques Rousseau

And that is just the point... how the world, moist and beautiful, calls to each of us to make a new and serious response. That's the big question, the one the world throws at you every morning. “Here you are, alive. Would you like to make a comment? [or a commitment? A promise?]”

Mary Oliver

“Say Yes. Whatever it is, say yes with your whole heart and simple as it sounds that’s all the excuse life needs to grab you by the hands and start to dance.”

Brian Andreas

You Reading This, Be Ready  
Starting here, what do you want to remember?  
How sunlight creeps along a shining floor?  
What scent of old wood hovers, what softened  
sound from outside fills the air?

Will you ever bring a better gift for the world  
than the breathing respect that you carry  
wherever you go right now? Are you waiting  
for time to show you some better thoughts?

When you turn around, starting here, lift this  
new glimpse that you found; carry into evening  
all that you want from this day. This interval you spent  
reading or hearing this, keep it for life –

What can anyone give you greater than now,  
starting here, right in this room, when you turn around?

William Stafford

“...[There is promise and power in those that have gone before us.] When we allow our spiritual forebears to speak, ... we will discover potential mentors for our own religious pilgrimage. ... in every generation, each individual must discover and embrace those truths in his or her own way if they are to evoke the power to transform. This is the miracle of a ‘living tradition’ – the ability to create anew the wisdom of ... those who have come before us that can guide us as we encounter our own future.”

Rev. Tim Jensen

## Videos and Podcasts

### [What Country Does the Most Good?](#)

The promise of a better world perhaps lies with the “Good Country Index” that Policy advisor Simon Anholt developed. Check out this talk about national behaviors and how we measure the good we do for the promise of a better collective future.

### ***\*must watch***

[UU Sanctuaries](#), Washington, DC Video: The promise of love reaching us as we reach out to each other.

Movie Clip On [Protecting the Promise and Potential Within](#): Will Smith with the best advice a dad can give to his own son. Don’t ever let somebody tell you, you can’t do something...

## Articles on Promises

[Bound in Covenant](#), by Rev. Victoria Safford

Our history of covenant and one example of its modern practice in congregational life

[We Are Already in Paradise](#), by Rev. Rebecca Parker

There is no land promised to any of us than the land already given, the world already here.

[How to Make and Keep a Promise to Yourself](#)

[11 Promises to Yourself](#)

[5 Promises You Should Make to Yourself Everyday](#)

[20 Promises To Your Dearest Sister](#)

## Books

***Active Hope: How to Face the Mess Where in without Going Crazy***, by Joanna Macy

A celebration of promise and hope over powerlessness

***Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in Challenging Times***, by Paul Rogat Loeb

Another celebration of promise and hope over powerlessness

***The Four Agreements: A Toltec Wisdom Book***, by Don Miguel Ruiz

Four promises that can transform how we live our lives

## Future Themes

We join with close to twenty other Canadian Unitarian congregations in engaging with these themes over the coming months. Thematic resource packets are available on our website, and through the Chalice Lighter for the first Sunday in the month.

September: Promise

October: Healing

November: Story

December: Presence

January: Prophecy

February: Interdependence

March: Risk

April: Transformation

May: Embodiment