

What does it mean to be a people of **Service**?

Service is Our Prayer



Throughout this year, we have been diving into the meaning of the words of our covenant that we say every week to begin our worship service. The third line of our covenant reads, “And service is our prayer.” Prayer is not the easiest word for Unitarian Universalists because we don’t all mean the same thing by it and some would rather we not use it all. Some of us UU’s pray, some don’t, some meditate, or have another kind of practice. I have grown fond of an image from Quaker tradition that describes prayer as holding people in light.

Personally, I find both beauty and something lacking in the image of “service is our prayer.” What is meaningful to me about it is that it reminds us that prayer alone cannot address the needs of our world. Prayer alone cannot rebuild a city, prayer alone cannot cure a disease, or bring down systematic injustice – these require action. And so to covenant that “service is our prayer” reminds us that we must engage the world with action, that we must live our prayers (our hopes for the world) in service, in action in the world.

And yet, even with all this being said, there is a role for prayer, for silence, for contemplative space in our lives. Our best actions arise from a place of reflection and discernment. Our best service comes when we cultivate compassion and listening, both which are enhanced through spiritual practice. We don’t have to use the word prayer, but we must be careful not to ignore the spiritual aspects of our lives and our knowing. There is great wisdom within us, but we have to make room to listen for it.

The African American Christian theologian, Howard Thurman, writes “There is something in every one of you that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself.

It is the only true guide you will ever have. And if you cannot hear it, you will all of your life spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls.”

Service is a way that we are able to give of our gifts to others, to benefit the common good. Service often requires us to give something up – it means being dedicated to something and someone beyond our own small sphere. One of the challenges we face today is that our models of service and leadership (which is a form of service) have become so separated from spiritual health that many are hungry for authentic, spiritually grounded leadership, but struggling to find it. And those who embody that leadership are wary to put themselves forward. But, I have hope! Because there is work unfolding in many places nurturing spiritual leadership and spiritual activism. And even in our own Unitarian Universalist tradition, we are seeing a resurgence of attention to the need to attend to and nurture our spiritual foundation as a place from which our service and action and living may arise.

I look forward to this month exploration of the many facets of what it means to be a people of service.

Rev. Susan



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Living the Theme: Service

Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to experience the theme and what you learned from the practice.

A Give Em' Five

Serving a worthy cause doesn't have to be all-consuming. Consider giving 5% of your time to an organization you care about. Five percent of a month is just one and a half days! If your time is limited, look for one-time volunteering opportunities, or choose an event where your entire family can spend a Saturday helping out. You can even serve virtually by using your computer or language skills. Visit www.volunteermatch.org to get ideas.

- Collect and sort children's clothes, books and toys. Donate them to a family shelter.
- Make cards to be sent overseas to military personnel who need a word of encouragement.
- Distribute bottles of water, clean T shirts and socks and toiletry kits to homeless people.

B Help children to serve

Brainstorm with the children in your life to discover ways they can serve the people in their community. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Have kids chip in some of their allowance to purchase a gift from Heifer International and help families around the world become self-reliant. (See www.heifer.org for more information.)
- Plant individual flowering plants in pots. Deliver them to a long-term care facility for senior adults.
- Help children to prepare muffins and fruit cups. Deliver them to their school for teachers to enjoy.
- Collect bottles of shampoo and soap to donate to a women's shelter.

C Serve at UUCP!

Everyone has something to offer that can improve our beloved community. A friendly smile on Sundays is encouraged in the Welcoming Ministry. Handyman and gardening skills are needed on the Campus Care Team. A friendly card or phone call are appreciated on our Unicare Team. What do you have to offer? An ability with numbers? Graphic design skills? Musical abilities? A way with children? Contact the Membership and Volunteer Coordinator, Kristina Benner, to explore ways you can serve at UUCP. She can be reached at KristinaBenner@phoenixuu.org or 602-840-8400 x204.

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Questions to Live With



Simply look over these questions and find one that “hooks” you. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into – and break open – your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your group prepared to share the journey.

1. Our covenant states, “Service is our prayer.” **How do you live this in your own life? What does it mean to you?**
2. **What role does service play in your own life?**
3. While our theme is on service, this part of our covenant also speaks of prayer. **What does your prayer life look like?** Do you have a spiritual or prayer practice? **How does it inform how you live and how you serve?**
4. **Have you ever had experience where someone else’s service to you felt like a prayer?** Have you had a powerful experience of someone serving you?
5. **Have you ever had a powerful experience when you were in service to another person or group of people?** What was the experience like? What did you learn or take away from the experience?
6. **As a Unitarian Universalist, where is the intersection in your own life between tending to your own heart and spirit and offering service in the world?** Has that intersection or balance changed over your life?
7. **Is there anything you are willing (or have been willing) to sacrifice to be of service to others?**
8. **Where do you find the most meaning in service?** What has been the most meaningful service you’ve ever given?
9. **Have there been costs to being of service?** What have been the costs and how have you understood the balance between sacrifice and benefit in giving to others?
10. **Have you had an experience of military service, or had family members in the service?** How has that shaped how you understand this type of service and the costs and honors of this service?
11. The service industry is one of the areas that is growing in the US (and has been for a long time). **What is your relationship to those who work in the service industry? Have you ever worked as a server?** Do you have opinions about the economic challenges of the service industry and what it may mean for our nation that this is our major growth area?
12. **Are there situations where doing something in service turned out to be harmful?** How do we be accountable in our service work to make sure that what we are offering is meeting the needs of others?



Image credit: Jessica Ferguson via UUmmediaworks.tumblr.com

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Wise Words

Service: a useful or helpful act; a contribution to the welfare of others.

UUCP's Covenant

Love is the doctrine of this congregation
The quest for truth is our sacrament
And service is our prayer
To dwell together in peace
To seek knowledge in freedom
To share our strength in fellowship
Thus do we covenant.

Love cannot remain by itself—it
has no meaning.
Love has to be put into action and
that action is service.
Whatever form we are,
able or disabled,
rich or poor,
it is not how much we do,
but how much love we put in the
doing;
a lifelong sharing of love with others.

Mother Teresa

You must get involved to have an impact.

Napoleon Hill

The greatest use of life is to spend it for something that will
outlast it.

William James

What are you doing for others?

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come
alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who
have come alive.

Howard Thurman

Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't
have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make
your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full
of grace. A soul generated by love.

Martin Luther King Jr.

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community, and
as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I
want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work,
the more I live.

George Bernard Shaw

Celebrate what you want to see more of.

Tom Peters

Start by doing what is necessary; then do what's possible; and
suddenly you are doing the impossible.

St. Francis of Assisi

No one is useless in this world who lightens the burden of it for
anyone else.

Charles Dickens

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Wise Words

This is what you shall do:

Love the earth and sun and the animals,
Despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks,
Stand up for the stupid and crazy,
Devote your income and labors to others,
Hate tyrants, argue not concerning God,
Have patience and indulgence toward the people,
Take off your hat to nothing known or unknown,
Or to any man or number of men,
Go freely with powerful uneducated persons,
And with the young and with the mothers of families,
Read these leaves in the open air,
Every season of every year of your life,
Reexamine all you have been told,
At school at church or in any book,
Dismiss whatever insults your own soul,
And your very flesh shall be a great poem,
And have the richest fluency not only in its words,
But in the silent lines of its lips and face,
And between the lashes of your eyes,
And in every motion and joint of your body.

Walt Whitman

To me, the most important reminder about service is to serve with humility. Otherwise, the service can be patronizing. Finding the right time and place to serve depends on many factors, but everyone has unique strengths, passions and values, and something to contribute. I love the quote from the late Rev. Forrest Church: "Want what you have, Be who you are, Do what you can". A compassionate heart will always find some way to be of service.

Small Group Facilitator

To know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived- This is to have succeeded.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

If the world were merely seductive, that would be easy. If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.

E.B. White

Teach this triple truth to all-
A generous heart, kind speech,
And a life of service and compassion
Are things which renew humanity.

The Buddha

Do all the good you can
by all the means you can
in all the ways you can
in all the places you can
as long as ever you can.

John Wesley

Service is such a huge part of being a UU that I've always sort of taken it for granted -- done as much as I could afford or had time for and then felt vaguely guilty that I didn't do more. But I ran across a quote from Julian Bond that gave me something of a shock. Julian Bond was an African American civil rights activist who visited my alma mater, DePauw University:

"Many are attracted to social service -- the rewards are immediate, the gratification quick.

But if we have social justice, we won't need social service."

That shocked me a bit, because I never realized quite how much we take for granted that there will always be people who are left behind and need help from us, the lucky, more advantaged ones. How smug is that? Should we all be working much harder to correct the inequalities and injustices of life rather than trying over and over again to make up for them?

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Wise Words

Public service must be more than doing a job efficiently and honestly. It must be a complete dedication to the people and to the nation.

Margaret Chase Smith

You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.

Woodrow T. Wilson

Not for ourselves alone, are we born.
Cicero

Nurturing is not complex. It's simply being tuned in to the thing or person before you and offering small gestures toward what it needs at that time.

Mary Anne Radmacher

One act of beneficence, one act of real usefulness, is worth all the abstract sentiment in the world.

Ann Radcliffe

Compassion is the ultimate value in life. Service is the ultimate action.

Jonathan Lockwood Huie

I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.

Rabindranath Tagore

The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.

Mahatma Gandhi

The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But ... the

Good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'

Martin Luther King, Jr.

I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.

Albert Schweitzer



Image credit: Rebecca Murans, RaeRae Design

Protect your enthusiasm from the negativity and fear of others. Never decide to do nothing just because you can only do a little. Do what you can. You would be surprised at what "little" acts have done for our world.

Steve Maraboli, Unapologetically You: Reflections on Life and the Human Experience

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We are formed and molded by our thoughts. Those whose minds are shaped by selfless thoughts give joy when they speak or act. Joy follows them like a shadow that never leaves them.

The Buddha

In my own deepening understanding of myself. I find my capacity to service others is deepened as well. The better I am at self-care the more genuinely nurturing of others I am able to be.

Mary Ann Radmacher

I wake up in the morning asking myself what can I do today, how can I help the world today.

Julia Butterfly Hill

Make visible what, without you, might perhaps never have been seen.

Robert Bresson

Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth.

Muhammad Ali



Love cannot remain by itself -- it has no meaning.

Love has to be put into action and that action is service.

~ Mother Teresa



Image credit: Rebecca Murans, RaeRae Design

When donors visited the Black Panther Party, they came and saw our real programs, a real clinic, with real doctors and medics, giving service to people.

Bobby Seale

We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.

Mother Teresa

When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed.

Maya Angelou

You are what you do, not what you say you'll do.

C.G. Jung

I slept and I dreamed that life is all joy. I woke and I saw that life is all service. I served and I saw that service is joy.

Kahlil Gibran

Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others.

Booker T. Washington, Up from Slavery

Next to money and guns, the third largest North American export is the U.S. idealist, who turns up in every theater of the world: the teacher, the volunteer, the missionary,

the community organizer, the economic developer, and the vacationing do-gooders. Ideally, these people define their role as service. Actually, they frequently wind up alleviating the damage done by money and weapons, or "seducing" the "underdeveloped" to the benefits of the world of affluence and achievement.

Ivan Illich, To Hell With Good Intentions

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Recommended Resources

Books:

How Can I Help? By Ram Dass

Social Action Heroes: Unitarian Universalists who are Changing the World by Michelle Bates Deakin

UUSC advances human rights through grassroots collaboration. In more than a dozen countries throughout the world, UUSC fosters social justice and works toward a world free from oppression. Read more here:

<http://uuscs.org/>

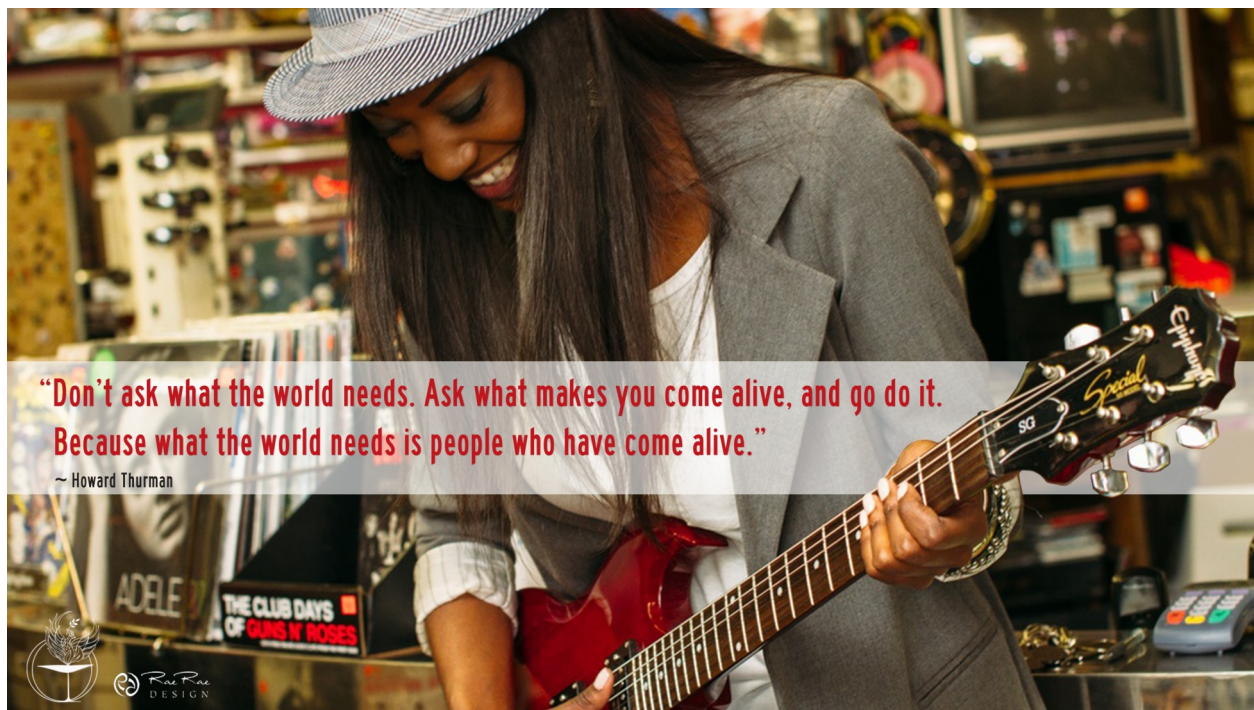


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Articles and Websites:

“Congregations Take Action: Resources for Justice”

<http://www.uua.org/action>

“Congregational Stories and Best Practices”

<http://www.uua.org/action/stories>

Videos and Music:

“What Must be Done” by Pat Wictor, Joe Jencks, and Greg Greenway

<http://tinyurl.com/greenway-must-be-done>

“This is the New Year” by A Great Big World

<http://tinyurl.com/this-is-the-new-year>

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