

**Welcome** Cappy Nunlist  
**Prelude** Song Without Words by Ladukhim

**Chalice Lighting** - "Invitation" by Shel Silverstein

If you are a dreamer, come in.  
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,  
A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer . . .  
If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire,  
For we have some flax golden tales to spin.  
Come in!  
Come in!

**Opening Words** This House, Responsive Reading #444

**Opening Hymn:** Enter, Rejoice, and Come in #361

### **Sacred Sharing**

Often our joys are too great for one heart to hold. This is a time and place for sharing that joy.

Often our sorrows are too great for one heart to bear. This is a time and place for sharing that burden.

Choosing a stone, feel its weight and texture, remember its age, and let some of your joy or your sorrow flow from the palms of your hands to this stone, making it a symbol.

With words or in silence, place the stone in this chalice. In this way we place our deepest feelings in the care of congregation.

Know that we will each be tenderly held through sorrow.

Know that we will dance together in joy.

This last stone will represent those joys and sorrows which remain unexpressed.

**Hymn** Spirit of Life #123

**Story Time** Winnie-the-Pooh and the Expedition,  
A. A. Milne, retold by Cappy Nunlist

**Music** “A Place in the Choir” by Bill Staines

**Homily** Ingathering

Welcome!

There is a place in this choir - or this tech crew - or this social justice task force - for you!

I'm Sparrow, and for the last 13 years I've been privileged to be the Credentialed Religious Educator for this UU Congregation of the Upper Valley. As a Unitarian Universalist religious educator, it's my job to first say “Welcome” and then to help other people say “Welcome” too!

Hug yourself. Please welcome yourself and thank yourself for taking this time to connect with something you hold important - or which you hope will be important in your life and in the life of the community.

My grandmother had the best posture of anyone I ever knew.

Not ramrod straight, not stiff, but gracefully and athletically and living large! So, backs tall, shoulders wide, and I'm going to tell you one of the biggest lessons Nana taught me on my way to becoming a religious educator. She said, "Now, dear, when you greet someone, I want you to offer them a firm handshake. You smile and look them right in the eye and let them know how glad you are to see them!"

Please offer a welcoming hand or welcoming words to someone near you. Welcome! Welcome back! How great to see you!

With a deep breath - and if it's your nature, with open arms - welcome this whole congregation together .

This congregation has some flax-golden tales to spin. We have the story of our founding, the creation of the Spirit In Nature path. But revelation is not sealed. We have the story of the 2012 Presidential election and how people of the UUCUV helped register and drive voters - that one hasn't been told yet! We have the story of how we shared a book in common this fall and a brand new congregant otherwise feeling a little quiet during coffee hour felt very comfortable approaching our teens and asking them about their reading of *The Hobbit*. That story hasn't been told yet, either! Or the story of how our Christmas Eve service gave a very lonely person some succour and hope; that story has probably happened before - but it's a good story, and deserves to happen again.

So, pack your backpacks with friendliness, helping, welcoming, volunteering!

Will you have these adventures and tell these stories with me?

Open your hearts further- and your arms if you have room. Embrace the Upper Valley, North America, this spinning blue-green jewel in a black velvet setting. Breathe them all in. Welcome into this covenant folks you will never meet. And four-foot neighbors and friends in the ocean, and friends with wings, and friends we can't see. Welcome the friends we have not met and cannot yet imagine.

As part of the oral boards in my credentialing process, I was asked, "What do you think is the theological direction of this faith movement in the 21st century?" I thanked my examiners for a nice, easy job. "Good, old-fashioned Universalism," I replied. Hosea Ballou preached in that white church right there and we folks in northern New England have not forgotten. Who is welcome? Everyone. What if their church looks different from mine? Everyone. What if their faces are different from mine? Everyone. What if they have tentacles and come in a spaceship?

I guarantee, when the Unitarians make First Contact, the Universalists will make friends.

In the course of professional development, I was asked to meditate on the moment I knew I really belonged to a UU Congregation.

Identification with the philosophy, theology, polity of Unitarian Universalism can be private moments, or long-unfolding stories.

But being part of a congregation - that's group magic, and can often be recognized in one moment. It might be that moment of signing the membership book - but not necessarily.

The moment for me was when I was 10 and I was helping at the First Universalist Church Lenten luncheon- as you do - and Jennie Maintain (who was about a hundred and eight) taught me how to cut a pie in sevenths.

Why on earth would we cut a pie in sevenths? (Congregation?)

Our eyes can easily discern eighths. From a compass rose to most pizzas, we have seen a circle cut in eighths many, many times. It's easy to cut a pie into eighths just so and so and so and so. It is also easy to cut a pie into sixths. In fact, when our eyes see a slice of pie that is larger than one eighth, we know our host has cut the pie in sixths - how generous!

So, if you can cut one nice slice this way, and then one cut straight up... and then make three out of these sections...

There! Now you know how to cut a pie in sevenths! Jennie Maintain may have been teaching me explicitly how to be both generous with my pie and frugal enough to get an extra serving out of it. What she really taught me is that "Now you know the secrets of this congregation. We expect you to be serving pie with us for a long time. Now you belong."

The "belonging" secrets of this congregation have to do with crock pots and folding chairs and fitting our entire worship and Sunday School accoutrements into one closet. The discovery of

these secrets I leave to you. But there is a moment - either in a tale already told or going-to-be-told - when you will realize that you belong. And you will come in by the kitchen door.

I am currently taking an on line course on classic Science Fiction. For our first paper, we're considering the foundational question of science fiction: Is the creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* human?

I think that's the wrong question.

I think that our Universalist heritage points me at a much better question.

I think the right question is, "Would you like to have a seat? Do you have time for a cup of coffee while we talk and listen to one another?"

I think the right question is any question which says, "I'm so glad you're here."

### **Offertory**

The offering which supports the infrastructure of this congregation will be gratefully received.

**Closing Hymn #131**

Love Will Guide Us

**Fire-Tending**