

JOURNEYS
Theme Packet for September 2015
The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough

What does it mean to be people of
Invitation?




Clearing

Do not try to save the whole world
or do anything grandiose.
Instead, create a clearing
in the dense forest of your life
and wait there patiently,
until the song that is your life falls
into your own cupped hands
and you recognize and greet it.
Only then will you know
how to give yourself to this world
so worthy of rescue.

~ *Martha Postlewaite*

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WONDERINGS *about* INVITATION

Cupped hands. What an image of invitation! Then, says the poet, create a clearing, and invite the song that is your life to fall into those cupped hands. That song will teach you how to give yourself to this world.

“Invitation” invites many interpretations. It may be an invitation to something new and exciting. Or, we can be invited to step forward...a call into relationship, or dialogue, or learning. We might be the host or the guest...the giver of the invite or the recipient of the invitation...and from either perspective, it can be heart-felt or it can feel obligatory. Further, invitations can imply that only some are invited, creating in us the fear of rejection.

But what of this invitation that comes from within...a song that, while deeply our own, also comes from something or somewhere beyond ourselves? What does it take to hear this song? If Postlewaite is right, a space must be made, a clearing must be created, and otherness must be invited in.

Such otherness takes many forms. Unitarian Universalists often focused on the otherness of diverse perspectives and ideas. We have a rich tradition of desiring to expand the circle to make room for multiple voices. The practice of trying to hear and invite in voices other than our own is a spiritual practice many of us share, believing that there is power and holiness in a chorus of diversity.

in · vi · ta · tion
/invə' tāSH(ə)n/
n.

1. the act of inviting, such as an offer of entertainment or hospitality
2. the act of enticing or attracting; allurement
3. a formal request to be present or participate

synonyms: encouragement, provocation, temptation, lure, magnet, bait, enticement, attraction, allure; come-on

But right alongside the chorus of multiple voices and perspectives sits another kind of otherness. It is the otherness of our particular calling, our particular voice, our particular song. It is never separate from us and yet it is also never quite under our complete control. I presume that every single one of us knows how easy to lose touch with our own voice. As Postlewaite’s poem says, we make dense forests of our lives where what is most precious is not easily seen or heard.

So clearings become essential. Some may say that the sacred is earned by believing the right things. But what if the sacred doesn’t arrive until we are able to carve out the right amount of space?

Are you making room? Are you committed to the precious clearing? Have you arranged a life with enough space to invite otherness in?

And so as this new year begins, we start with cupped hands.

~ Rev. Julie

STORIES *about* INVITATION

The First Banquet (retold by Nasruddin)

One day, it happened that someone said something to someone, who said something to someone else, who somehow formed the impression I was an important person. The result of this chain of folly was that I was invited to be the guest of honor at a banquet. I was puzzled but honored to be given such an invitation.

At the appointed day I presented myself at the door of the banquet hall. I had walked all day in my usual simple garb to get to the city in which the banquet was being held, and the guards at the door took one look at me and barred the door.

"But I'm Nasruddin, the guest of honor!"

"Of course you are!" the guards laughed. "Go away, old man, and don't let us see you here again!"

I obliged them with the first part of their request. The banquet hall was located on the city square, and I recognized a friend's house on the opposite side. I walked there and knocked. My friend answered.

"Nasruddin!" he embraced me and we gave each other warm greetings. I came right to the point.

"Do you remember that red brocade coat you wanted to give me last year?" I asked.

"Certainly! It still hangs in my closet, waiting for you. Are you ready to receive it?"

"With gratitude," I replied.

We visited for a brief while, then I received the coat and put it on. I made my apologies and departed back across the square, adorned

with a dazzling brocade coat with gold braid and colored stones lining the epaulets. The buttons were ivory, the fastenings were jet black. All in all, I was a wonderful sight.

The guards bowed low at my approach, and ushered me into the banquet hall. The table was richly laid. Someone showed me to a seat at the head of the table, and announced "The august, the wise, the true Nasruddin!" I sat, and everyone else sat at the same moment.

They all watched expectantly, waiting to see what the guest of honor would do. The first course was soup. When it was served, all eyes were on me. I picked up my bowl of soup and stood, holding it high. Then I poured the soup down the front of my coat.

The guests were astounded. A gasp arose so that the air was almost sucked from the room. Then they broke into remonstrations and shouts. "What are you doing! What are you thinking!"

When it was quiet enough so I could speak, I addressed my coat. "O coat, I hope you have enjoyed that delicious soup. It is clear that it is you who are welcome here, not I!"



Her best decision all year

When Brooke Ochoa went to lunch by herself, she could have kept her gaze fixed to her phone, barely taking in the information from the environment around her. But she tuned in. She noticed people. She noticed Delores. And what came of that is truly beautiful.



"Today I went to eat at a restaurant for lunch and I saw this elder lady coming from afar so I waited to hold the door for her, she was very thankful and sweet. She then told the waitress, "table for one", so I waited and hesitated but then I walked over and said, "I'm eating by myself too. Would you like to have lunch together?" She was ecstatic! Come to find out she spent the last decade living with her mom who recently passed away and her aunt who recently was put into a nursing home, so she has been having a hard time being alone. We had a wonderful talk, and she just kept smiling and saying thank you for listening to me, which made me smile too! Her words healed my heart just as much as I healed her lonely one. By far the best decision I've

made all year!!! Her name is Delores, and we will be having lunch every Thursday from now on."

<http://www.upworthy.com/she-timidly-asked-the-woman-eating-alone-if-she-could-join-her-it-was-her-best-decision-all-year?c=is1>

QUESTIONS *for reflection on* INVITATION

- Is there enough silence, stillness and space in your life to hear "the invitation"?
- What invitation is being offered to you in these days? Or what invitation do you want to offer?
- What purpose might you want to serve when choosing what to invite...or when choosing to accept an invitation?
- If it is true that each of us has a unique calling, what's yours? Have you found it? Are you living your calling?
- What hurts and joys have you experienced around not being invited or receiving an invitation?
- What is the relationship between "invitation" and belonging?
- What qualities or conditions must exist for you to feel "invited"?
- Many traditions talk about the divine as an 'ache' or 'lure' that invites us to transformation. Do you experience such a divine ache or lure in your life? Do you want to?
- What question is this theme inviting *you* to ask?

INSPIRATIONS *on the theme of* INVITATION

If you are a dreamer, come in,
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!

~ Shel Silverstein, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*

You don't have to attend every argument you're invited to.

~ ANON

A real conversation always contains an invitation. You are inviting another person to reveal herself or himself to you, to tell you who they are or what they want.

~ David Whyte

Our weakness is an invitation to discover God's strength.

~ Carlos A. Rodriguez

Hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbor into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories, and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit.

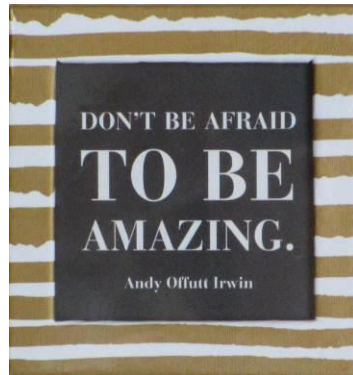
~ Henri Nouwen

Be prepared to say "no" to some things. That is the key. When you say "yes" to every invitation, event and call, you will come back to meet you plans on the paper in the same state you left them.

~ Israelmore Ayivor, *Shaping the Dream*

I'd learned enough from life's experiences to understand that destiny's interventions can sometimes be read as invitation for us to address and even surmount our biggest fears. It doesn't take a great genius to recognize that when you are pushed by circumstance to do the one thing you have always most specifically loathed and feared, this can be, at the very least, an interesting growth opportunity.

~ Elizabeth Gilbert, *Committed: A Skeptic Makes Peace with Marriage*

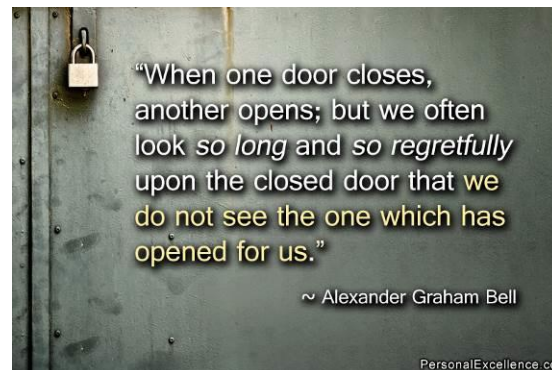


There is only one invitation it would kill me to refuse, yet I'm tempted to turn it down all the time. I get the invitation every morning when I wake up to actually live a life of complete engagement, a life of whimsy, a life where love does. It doesn't come in an envelope. It's ushered in by a sunrise, the sound of a bird, or the smell of coffee drifting lazily from the kitchen. It's the invitation to actually live, to fully participate in this amazing life for one more day. Nobody turns down an invitation to the White House, but I've seen plenty of people turn down an invitation to fully live. I think every day God sends us an invitation to live and sometimes we forget to show up or get head-faked into thinking we haven't really been invited. But you see, we have been invited -- every day, all over again.

~ Bob Goff, *Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World*

When 'happiness' eludes us - as, eventually, it always will - we have the invitation to examine our programmed responses and to exercise our power to choose again.

~ Richard Rohr



Never open the door to a lesser evil, for other and greater ones invariably slink in after it.

~ Baltasar Gracián, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*

I hate these affairs", he'd told her once, tearing up an engraved invitation to an exclusive charity ball. "They're the worst kind of discrimination. An invitation doesn't really mean that you're invited; it means that a whole lot of people aren't.

~ Melinda Cross, *One Hour of Magic*

To get, simply release, and then gently invite.

~ Bryant McGill, *Simple Reminders: Inspiration for Living Your Best Life*

We live between the act of awakening and the act of surrender. Each morning, we awaken to the light and the invitation to a new day in the world of time; each night, we surrender to the dark to be taken to play in the world of dreams where time is no more.

~ John O'Donohue

Practicing INVITATION

Option A: An Invitation to Redefine Meaning

The poem "The Invitation" by Oriah Mountain Dreamer invites us to completely rethink what this game of life is all about. Forget "what you do for a living" or "how much money you have," it says. Instead tell us about your ability to "risk looking like a fool for love," to "disappoint another to be true to yourself" or to be "weary and bruised to the bone, but still do what needs to be done for the children." It represents a radically counter-cultural vision of 'the good life.' This month, engage its invitation.

- Spend a week with the poem: <http://www.absolute1.net/poem-oriah-mountain-dreamer-invitation.htm>
- Read it at least once a day for a few days.
- Pick the one line that you hope will most characterize your life. Don't worry about whether or not you are currently living up to it. This is about aspiration.
- Share your reflections with others. Why is this particular invitation aspirational for you?



Option B: Is This A "UFP Invitation Song"?

Watch and listen to this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNx10tHhpvU>

On the surface of things, the answer is simple: this is NOT a UU invitation song. But might it be, or something like it? Your exercise, if you are willing to do it, is to listen to it over and over until you find, not only you, but us in it. Where do you feel the invitation to us in it? What invitation is it offering that you want to hear? Or, how would you re-write the song to be a UFP Invitation Song?

Option C: Inviting In the Voices of *Black Lives Matter*

The sermon, "I, Racist" has been one of the most read and forwarded pieces of the Black Lives Matter conversation. For many, it is a challenging piece to invite into one's heart and consciousness. But if being "a people of invitation" means anything, it means at least being willing to make space for and invite in hard truths and new perspectives.

So this exercise invites you to invite it in. Read the sermon: <https://thsppl.com/i-racist-538512462265> Sit with it. Open your heart to it. Let it validate you. Let it make you defensive. Let it make you cry. Let it make you angry. Everyone is sure to have different reactions. This is not about responding "correctly." It is about finding a way to respond as a "person of invitation." It's written in the US context, but consider what this means for UFP and in Canada. Figure out what that means for you.

Option D: Invite a Friend to Fellowship

This exercise may seem predictable, but that doesn't mean it's easy. Many of us have a complicated relationship with sharing our faith and inviting others in. If sorting through those complications is something your heart is calling you to do, then this exercise is for you. Don't rush into it. Take time to figure out why you want to invite someone to join us. This exercise is really about you figuring out your reason. Once, you've got better clarity, go do it.



FYI: October 18 is "Bring a Friend" Sunday!

Resources on INSPIRATION



ON THE WEB

Invitation by Mary Oliver

<http://yearsrisingmaryoliver.blogspot.com/2010/10/invitation.html>

Prospective Immigrants Please Note by Adrienne Rich

<https://vimeo.com/39836802>

The Mountain and the River by Pablo Neruda

<https://calebbeisert.wordpress.com/2013/02/11/the-mountain-and-the-river-by-pablo-neruda/>

Our House is So Big. Lisa Kron

An acceptance speech that declares "Our house is so big" and invites us all to not go back into our tiny separate rooms

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AejUt7TdeXI&app=desktop>

Following an Ancient Call, Christine Valters Paintner

An essay that wrestles with two very different ancient invitations and callings: "the bear hibernates to regain its power and the salmon follows the ancient call back home."

<http://abbeyofhearts.com/blog/2013/08/19/following-an-ancient-call-a-love-note-from-your-online-abbess/>

Pope Francis Invites Climate Change-Fighting Mayors to The Vatican

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/pope-francis-invites-climate-change-fighting-mayors-to-the-vatican_55acf6e3e4b0caf721b323f8

Sorry, You Aren't Invited: A Practical Guide to Children's Birthday Party Guest Lists

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/emmajenner/guide-to-childrens-parties_b_2848580.html

MOVIES

Shrek (2001 - PG)

Invitation to see others for who they truly are.

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (1967 - NR)

A couple's attitudes are challenged when their daughter introduces them to her African-American fiancé.

The Visitor (2007 - PG13)

A college professor travels to New York City to attend a conference and finds a young couple living in his apartment.

Grand Canyon (1991 - R)

An invitation for two families to enter into each other's very different lives.

Wings of Desire (1987 - PG13)

Peter Falk offers an invitation to Bruno Ganz: *Join me in becoming human!* An angel tires of overseeing human activity and wishes to become human when he falls in love with a mortal.

Lee Daniels' The Butler (2013 - PG13)

Cecil Gaines serves eight presidents during his tenure as a butler before he is invited to a White House dinner.

Children's Books on INVITATION

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll

The Story of the Little Gray Mouse by Dorothy Sherrill

A House for Hermit Crab by Eric Carle

Come Out And Play Little Mouse by Robert Kraus

Not Afraid Of Dogs

by Susanna Pitzer

Tea Rex by Molly Idle

Seven Fathers

retold by Ashley Ramsden

In the Tree House by Andrew

Larsen & Dušan Petričić



Table Grace *on* INVITATION

With gratitude and joy,
we receive this gift of food.
Into ourselves we invite these changing forms
of light...
Other bodies becoming our body...
Other life becoming our life.
An invitation to remember
that we are one body, shared by all. Amen.

MUSIC

The Invitation, Dana and Susan Robinson
<http://youtu.be/z3pLjpmDbUo>

Land of Milk and Honey, Kelley Hunt
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bt15zL8ctEI>

Come and Go With Me - UU Hymn
<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/journeys/session1/132151.shtml>

Peter, Paul & Mary's version:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXEf_Wld8h

May I Suggest, Red Molly/Susan Werner
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSO-WrIWOtg>

The Guest House by Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

BOOKS

Reason and Reverence: A New Religious Humanism by William Murry
Humanism as an invitation to be fully human

Inviting Silence - Universal Principles of Meditation by Gunilla Norris
The basic principles of meditation and mindful living are explained in this guide for everyday living.

Living Beautifully: with Uncertainty and Change by Pema Chodron
An invitation to live into uncertainty not resist it.

A Hidden Wholeness by Parker Palmer
Palmer invites us to address our yearning to live undivided lives – lives that are congruent with our inner truth – in a world filled with the forces of fragmentation.

Chalice Lighting *on* INVITATION

Spirit of fire, spirit of life:
We invite your fire to make this a place of questioning and curiosity.
We invite your warmth to make this a place of connection and healing.
We invite your light to create in us a circle of love, ever expanding, ever growing.

—Adapted from the words of Sue Ayer

October's theme:

Embodiment

Email your ideas for themes, or suggestions for resources to share in this packet to uurevjs@gmail.com

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