

**LEANING IN... TO DISCOMFORT**  
THE UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP OF PETERBOROUGH  
REV. JULIE STONEBERG  
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**OPENING WORDS**      *When We Pause to Remember*      ~ Alicia Forde

I have intentionally chosen words and songs this morning, for the most part, that do not come from white authors and lyricists. These are the words of Alicia Forde, the Professional Development Director at the Unitarian Universalist Association, who identifies as an African descent, queer, cis-gender female with deep roots in Tobago. When We Pause to Remember...

When we pause to remember who we are:  
    companions on this grand experiment called life,  
  
when we take a moment to shed the ways we have been carefully taught:  
to lead from fear...to punish the poor...  
to persecute those who don't look like we do...  
to deny rights to those who love...to believe that we are separate...  
that some people are superior to others...  
  
When we take a moment to shed all of that and hear our stories  
    hear and see each other into existence, into community,  
    when we take a moment to embrace...to practice a different way of being...  
  
When we answer the call of love,  
then we are living into the promise  
    of building the world we dream about.  
  
It is beautiful to dream...to cast a vision...  
to stretch our minds into the future and imagine what may be if we were to  
build a new way of being – not some day but beginning again today  
    beginning again every day that we have breath  
taking courage with these hands and hearts  
to make real the dream of a more equitable world...  
to journey together...seeking to be transformed,  
even as we transform.  
Becoming explorers and learners in this world around us,  
humbled by what we do not yet know,  
fulfilling the promise of healing a fragmented world,  
laboring not just in hope, but also in Love.  
In this spirit, we commit.  
In this spirit, we pray.  
In this spirit, we gather.

**STORY FOR ALL**    *I Don't Want to be a Pea!*      ~ Ann Bonwill  
(In this story, a hippo and a pea, who are best friends, fight about what costume to wear, as

*neither of them wants to be the pea. In the end, they both show up as 'two peas in a pod.'*)

**SPOKEN MEDITATION**      *Our Work is Not Yet Done*    ~Peter Morales

Rev. Peter Morales is Latino and the former president of the Unitarian Universalist Association. This is his prayer...Our Work is Not Yet Done.

O, Spirit of Life and Love that lives within us and among us, be with us now. Help us take our history into our hearts as well as our minds. Open us, so that we can feel our past live in us – the joy, the disappointment, the passion, the pain, the hope. Let the past, all of it, live in the core of our being. Let us be humble. Let us be honest. Help us to take instruction from our past. And let us also be inspired. But more than anything, let us feel your spirit, the spirit of deep compassion, here among us at this very moment. O, Spirit of Love and Life, help us to know, truly know, that we are your people, bound together by our collective memory and, more importantly, by our shared aspirations. We are not perfect. We mess up. Sometimes we talk too much. Yet we are drawn together by what we love, by what we hold sacred and by a vision of what we may yet create together. Finally, tender and gentle Spirit, guide us. Inspire us. Embolden us. For our work, your work, O Spirit, is not yet done.

**READING**      *Who Is Welcome*      ~ Kristen Harper

This reading is from a UU meditation manual called "Voices from the Margins." The author, Rev. Kristen Harper, is of West Indian and Russian Lithuanian descent.

Who is Welcome?

Everybody wants a seat at the table. Blacks, Latinos, Asians, the poor, the disabled, gays and lesbians. Where are all the straight white men supposed to sit? I'm not prejudiced, I'm just asking. And what table are they talking about? My table only seats eight comfortably and I have service for ten. That's it. You'll just have to wait your turn. Can you imagine if we just let anyone sit at our table? Why we might have people who can't tell their salad fork from their dinner fork, or people who eat with their hands. I shudder to think.

Anyone is welcome at my table, in my home, as long as you don't have grease stains on your clothes and have washed your hands before you touch my silverware.

Everyone is welcome at my table – as long as you don't try to proselytize me to your religion or your politics. And don't get upset when I question yours. After all, it wasn't my faith that taught me to eat Jesus and drink his blood. Come on in, I say, but don't make fun of my pan-African sculpture and paintings mixed with chintzy curio Precious Moments figurines.

If you don't dress up and don't have every hair in place and you don't smell too fresh, you are welcome, but don't sit on the good leather, or the new futon cover. Here, let me get you a towel. I am told the outside shower works very well.

Everyone is welcome at my table as long as you sit still and don't wiggle or interrupt the grown-up conversations...children should be seen and not heard, but they should be dressed up on bows and satin so they can entertain us. Don't worry if they aren't talented, it only reflects on your upbringing, not mine. Truth is, I don't really have the room for you. Maybe next time. (*pause*)

**MESSAGE** *Leaning In... to Discomfort* ~ Rev. Julie Stoneberg

*We will observe a Remembrance Day minute of silence at 11am.*

Our theme for November would have us consider the practice of leaning in...which has many connotations. It might be leaning on something or someone for support, or leaning toward something that interests us or is attractive to us. Today, leaning in is about choosing to do a scary or risky thing, even though it's uncomfortable, and doing it because we recognize it to be the right thing to do.

This morning, following another White Allies workshop, we consider what it takes to operate as allies for those who have been marginalized, oppressed, and persecuted. How do we best show up for our Jewish friends?...our Indigenous friends?...our gender non-conforming friends? And even for those we have yet to call friends? Are those of us who are white prepared to be a little uncomfortable?

Last Saturday, on a chilly morning, in the midst of the Parliament of the World's Religions, and in response to the violence at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, I joined about 100 others who showed up at City Shul in Toronto to encircle the building while that congregation met for their morning service. It would have been more comfortable, surely, to sleep in, or choose the warmth of any interior space. It would have been more comfortable, surely, to stay at the Convention Centre for the morning assembly on Climate Action, or to attend a familiar Unitarian service where I would be with my people. But as the Jews arrived to pray, many came to us to offer thanks, or Timbits, or hugs...often with tears in their eyes...and I was glad I made the effort.

I understand that many of you were present for the special shabbat service and dinner here a week ago Friday, and that you also showed great friendship by staying after to help clean up. Our 'cousins in the house'...the Beth Israel congregation...have expressed much gratitude for your presence. It would have been more comfortable, surely, to spend your Friday evening at home with friends, or out listening to music, or...any number of other choices.

The next day, several members of our Indigenous Allies Working Group showed up at the Pigeon Lake cottagers' meeting. Allies had been called upon to show our support for indigenous rights to harvest rice on that lake...to help make visible the reality that our First Nation's neighbours are not alone. (And if you want to learn more about this issue, check out the Trent-sponsored panel discussion happening at Market Hall on Wednesday evening. That information was included in Friday's Flame.)

One who attended told me that showing up for that cottagers' meeting in one's body was uncomfortable, and a bit scary. Surely, it would have been more comfortable to

write a letter of support, or send a check, or just ignore it all together.

And just the other day, Kate, our Director of Religious Exploration, talked through today's children's programming with me; they're practicing being allies, by writing cards to our friends here at Beth Israel. Kate and I puzzled about how much or how little to talk with our children about Pittsburgh, and the Holocaust...and wouldn't it just be more comfortable to ignore human history, and turn off the news, and put our hands over our ears and eyes? The uncomfortable place is to talk the truth to our children, in age appropriate ways, and not to ignore or white-wash pains of the world.

If you are like me, it's easy to be conflicted about how best to use one's time and energy. We do, do, do...so much...and need to find joy and restoration when we can. It simply feels good to take advantage of our many creature-comforts... comfy homes with couches and TVs and warm beds, the ability to eat out or go see a movie, traveling, concerts, friends to spend time with. For the most part, we have worked hard to have these things, so why shouldn't we wrap ourselves up in them and shut out the needs and inequalities in the rest of the world?

But. But. Something continues to niggle inside us. Sometimes to gnaw. Sometimes to create psychological anxiety. Can I really relax into being happy and content when others are not? Can anyone be truly free or at peace when hatred and injustice and war are affecting so many?

Let me say this clearly. Life requires us to find balance. You are not bad when you make a choice to be comfortable. You did not choose to be born into the life and privileges you have. You are a beautiful human being, who like every other being deserves to feel good about who you are, and to have your basic needs met, for food and shelter and love...and met again...and met every day and in every moment...without question. You have done nothing wrong to be who you are. And it's never wrong to find joy in life.

But, I also choose to assume that you do want to lean into becoming an ally to those who are working hard for justice for themselves and their communities. I assume that part of what you want to lean into is a better sense of contributing to the common good, a world community where there is peace and justice for all. I see you doing it often and in many ways. I see you pointing yourself in that direction, leaning forward. I feel that energy in my own body. Let's all just take a moment and feel ourselves leaning into becoming better allies. Lean.

We feel enthusiastic and prepared. That is, until we realize how off center we are, and that the work requires that we enter into unfamiliar terrain. We find ourselves in situations where not everyone looks like us, or talks like us, or speaks the same language, or has the same degree of education as we do, or even holds the same values as we do. And it's uncomfortable. Suddenly we don't know what's acceptable or appropriate. Can we speak? If so, what should we say? What if we say or do the wrong thing? The situation feels tense...we feel unsafe, unsure, and incredibly vulnerable. Off balance. We realize we are actually unprepared. Even incompetent.

Do you recognize this feeling? Or the fear of this feeling?

I understand that human beings put things into categories. We make sense of the world by grouping like things together, and then creating stories of understanding that we can apply to anyone or anything in that category. In part, this ability, or default, is what has served to keep us alive as a species. Brené Brown tells us that our brains are wired for survival, and that the minute there's any threat...anxiety, or fear, or shame...we grab very quickly for a story that will tell us what to do...who or what is good or bad, safe or dangerous.<sup>1</sup>

And of course, the stories that come up first, are the ones we already know AND the ones we are most comfortable with. The stories we know tell us to be suspicious of the stranger. The stories we know tell us that THEY are dirty, or untrustworthy, or uncivilized. The stories we know tell us to stay with our own kind.

But if we want to be good allies, we have to be open to the discomfort. It is in discomfort that we find greater understanding, which then allows for a greater diversity of stories and realities and truths. In order to build that larger inner library, we're gonna have to go into unfamiliar places...to normalize discomfort, and to be open to hearing new stories,<sup>2</sup> because this is how we grow, and build real relationships.

I personally am trying to practice beginner mind when it comes to being an ally. I frankly don't know how to do it, or maybe, how to do it well enough to be willing to take some risks. In this regard, I found an article about 'leaning in' to being imperfect<sup>3</sup> to be helpful. It's listed in the resources in this month's theme packet and was written by Vikki Reynolds.

Reynolds says that being an ally can be an invitation to feeling self-righteous, while in actuality, the ability to be an ally is a sign of our privilege. It does not necessarily mean that we can be trusted. We are simply the ones who have some access to power, and therefore are needed because of the reality of social injustices. Allies are not invited in to be the experts or the leaders, but simply as 'good enough' under the circumstances. So being an ally requires humility.

Allyship also requires that we hold ourselves accountable in resisting ongoing colonialization and oppression. Because of our position, it is easy to inadvertently replicate power-over, to white-splain, and to remain center-stage. So being an ally calls us to accept critique with an open heart, always being willing to lean in to do more self-reflection. Another uncomfortable place.

Overwhelming, right? Sounds like being an ally is the work of heroes...too demanding us common folk. But, Reynolds says that we have to engage ally work as an imperfect project. We should just accept that we will be imperfect as allies, and that that's okay. (I know. That's hard for those of us who are white, because one trait of whiteness is a

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/brene-brown-discomfort\\_us\\_56128675e4b0af3706e14cc1](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/brene-brown-discomfort_us_56128675e4b0af3706e14cc1)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmwMiWRT8z0>

<sup>3</sup> <https://journals.gmu.edu/NandC/article/view/430/364>

striving for perfection.) But imperfection as allies, and being connected in a diverse community, is a better result than division, oppression, and inequality. In the end, it's not about us being good allies; it's about us working to co-create a society in which everyone experiences justice.<sup>4</sup> We will be imperfect in that work. But still, the work matters.

In yesterday's workshop, Wilburn and Pat<sup>5</sup> told us that moving toward being better allies involves really just two things. With one foot, we educate ourselves. Read more from authors of colour. Attend events that offer insights into communities other than our own. Ask questions and stay curious. Be open to learning.

With the other foot, we make contact. Find ways to be around black, indigenous, and people of colour. Go into different neighbourhoods. Eat at different restaurants. Attend the religious services of other faith groups. Go out of your way to spend time with others.

Educate yourself and make contact. Lean in, and then put one foot in front of the other. Stumbling perhaps. Not getting it right, perhaps. But still, slowly walking toward building real relationships. This is the work of allyship.

I focused on Indigenous programming at the Parliament of the World's Religions. What I heard over and over again, was that reconciliation 'simply' means being in right relationship. Seeing one another for who we are...human beings with dreams and challenges. Respecting one another...with different backgrounds, and practices, and worldviews and autonomy. Learning from one another without judgment, without exerting power over. Sitting at the world's table together, sharing the world's beauty and resources.

Brené Brown says that discomfort and vulnerability are where the juice happens in life.<sup>6</sup> And, here's the thing about discomfort. The more we allow for it, the more tolerance we develop for it, the more comfortable it becomes. Or, as an elder said last week, walking the road is what makes the road wider.

The road we are walking is toward a place where all people have equal rights and opportunities, where all live in peace without hatred or violence. It may sometimes be uncomfortable, but let us walk that road together.

So be it. Amen.

**READING**      *More Love*      ~ Nancy McDonald Ladd

These words were written as a call to worship, so I have adapted them a bit. They are the words of the Rev. Nancy McDonald Ladd...who to the best of my knowledge, identifies as white and cis-gender.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://journals.gmu.edu/NandC/article/view/430/364>

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Wilburn Hayden and Pat Trudeau presented a series of four workshops in Oct/Nov on being White Allies in Anti-Racism.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmwMiWRT8z0>

## More Love

We gather in community every Sunday in a state of conflict for our very souls – a state both expansively hopeful and restrictively confined.

We are hopeful that we might rise to meet a new day for those who seek and who serve the spirit, hopeful that each and every one of us might encounter the sacred within, among, and beyond every human soul, and hopeful that such an encounter might work through us to topple the idolatries of our age.

And yet we also gather as people who are not yet free – a people confined, unfree, contained.

We are confined, unfree, contained because in this culture of division built upon the pain of the people at the margins, even the decent people hold our love too tightly.

Putting it in boxes, prefacing it with qualifications: I will love you if – I will see you if – I will bear the truth of my soul alongside you if – and only if...

*You agree with me, you look like me, you stand like me, you think like me, you sing like me, you wear your gender on your sleeve and produce it upon demand.*

I will love you and will meet you in the sanctuary of our hearts – If and only if...

*You give me evidence of your good liberal virtues.*

If and only if...

*You never fail to speak the language of the movement and never weep upon a street corner out of grief for your sheer inadequacy and the vastness of the struggle that you cannot even name.*

We are imprisoned by these ifs and these only-ifs. We are confined by the smallness of our loving even as our souls remind us that we can only get free if we all get free together.

And so [now], as we intersect in honest work, let our hopefulness mingle with our conviction.

Let our willingness to love beyond our expectations or experience break down our long-held barriers.

Let our willingness to be honest about the hardest questions open us to new truths.

May there truly be more love,

With no labels

And no binary

And no preface

And no qualification

And no arithmetic

And no limit.

May there be more love to liberate us all, and may we keep on, today and every

day, until we find it, and share it, inch by precious inch, with one another and the world.

**CLOSING WORDS** *Prayer for Living in Tension* ~ Joseph Cherry

These are the words of Rev. Joe Cherry, a cis-gendered, Mexican/Polish, queer UU minister.

If we have any hope of transforming the world and changing ourselves,  
We must be  
bold enough to step into our discomfort  
brave enough to be clumsy there  
loving enough to forgive ourselves and others.

May we, as a people of faith, be granted the strength to be so bold, so brave, and so loving.

Go now, and step into your discomfort.

So be it. Amen.

**EXTINGUISHING THE FLAME**